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— Do the dead...
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DO THE DEAD LIVE?

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DO THE DEAD LIVE?



THE best index to a man's mind is his conduct. Watch the behavior of your friend when at work; watch him in his leisure hours; watch him when he is crossed, or tempted, or tired, or defeated, or triumphant. You will thus learn more about the excellences and the defects of his character, the trend of his thoughts, the nature of his ambitions, the probability of his success, than could be gathered from his sincerest attempt to analyze for you his mental and moral disposition.

So it is with an organization of men. So it is therefore with the Church, formed to conserve and to declare and to apply the truth delivered by Christ.

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

Watch her conduct. Mark the purpose of her feasts, and the manner in which she celebrates them. Note her ways of developing spiritual life in the soul. Observe her practical bearing toward the great haunting facts of human experience — growth, responsibility, temptation, sin, death. Thus you will learn much more about her real self than you could hope to obtain from the most minute study of her definitions and professions of faith.

Now, on All Souls' Day, as it is called, the Catholic Church makes a rather extraordinary manifestation of her mind. With very unusual insistence she then summons the faithful to remember and to assist their brethren who are dead. Unique in Office and in Mass, is her Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed.

On our imaginations the Liturgy then imprints the pictures of those who, going

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

before us into the valley of the shadow, have passed away in the friendship of Christ. There is general mourning. The wide world witnesses one great universal funeral service. The chant is a solemn dirge; the prayer begs the gift of eternal rest and perpetual light for the souls of the blessed dead; the Mass is the Mass of Requiem.

Nowhere within the far-stretching borders of her domain, will living man be utterly forgetful of the dead that day. Among all nations and in every place there will be offered the sacrifice of propitiation for the past sins and frailties of those who have died in the Lord. Graves will be visited. You will see a tear of remembrance on the mother's face. The father will kneel down to pray again at the grave of his son. The widow of twenty years ago will visit the tomb of her husband and murmur the prayer of a love not yet grown cold.

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

For these are children of a Mother who teaches that "it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead."

All this implies that a bond wonderfully firm and wonderfully lasting knits together those that have gone and those that still remain; that there is a union between souls which the power of death is helpless to destroy.

That there is purgation after death, that souls passing out of this life with even the slightest moral taint must suffer an experience of purifying pain—this doctrine is the basis of the Catholic observance of All Souls' Day.

How reasonable it appears to the Christian mind! The best of us are imperfect, and the purest somewhat stained. Those we love and revere most, those we deem worthy of the highest gifts of earth, the men and women who shine out as leaders of the strong and saviours of the weak, even they do

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

not seem holy as God is holy. Some lurking flaw, some almost invisible defect, some lingering imperfection clings to the most perfect of them. One alone is good—God!

Even though we are lying stunned under the shock of a dear one's death, even though we are crying out in wild protest against the decree which has snatched away a life unreservedly heavenly in its influence on our own—even then, we have but to gaze for an instant toward the all perfect God, and at once we realize that our purest and our noblest and our best beloved are weak and faulty in His sight, and that all humankind needs mercy and pardon and the grace of divine forgiveness.

And how consoling is the doctrine which enables us to reconcile our keen appreciation of God's ineffable sanctity with the conviction that those we love shall yet enter into His presence and be

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

made one with Him. How uplifting is the faith which gives us reason to believe that some mysterious process purges and refines the souls of the beloved dead until they become fit to repose in the bosom of the All Holy, where defilement and imperfection are inconceivable.

Again, what a blessed thing it is that we who remain behind are able to help those who have gone before. Is there any deeper instinct than that to which this ability affords satisfaction? When they have passed out of sight and no visible bond unites us to them, the purity of our affection is actually an aggravation of our pain. We are well nigh crazed at being so distant and so helpless, and sometimes even self-destruction would seem inviting to us in the madness of our grief. But who shall describe our happiness, if there come to us a divine messenger to whisper of the dear one dead, to assure us he is within

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

the shadow of the throne of God, to tell us even that we may help him.

And this is the second belief implied in the Commemoration of All Souls'—that we who still abide in the flesh may, by our prayers and good deeds, aid those who have gone before.

When all has been said, was there ever a generation more irrepressibly human than our own? Men were sterner in the days of old, and more brave perhaps. They bore pain better, they faced death with greater readiness, and they shuddered less at torture and at blood. But one cannot believe that they loved more deeply or that they felt the shock of separation more keenly than we. Women clung around their dead, it is true, in the ages gone by; and strong men often wept over the graves of children; and on each generation, as it passed away, there were laid the tokens of lasting remembrance and imperish-

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

able affection. But out of the very strength our ancestors possessed, it would seem, there must have sprung a greater power of resistance than that which nature gives to us.

Whether that be so or not, this at least is clear, that we nowadays are totally incapable of bearing death's cruel blows without the assistance of religion. Our dead belong to us and we refuse to believe that we have been forever separated from or that we are helpless to do aught for them. Almost as if in reply to an imperious demand of ours the Church's voice declares "the prayers of the living avail to aid the souls of them that are dead."

It is wide in its sweep, this principle of Catholic teaching. It proclaims that there are no walls of partition between the souls of the just, either on this side of the tomb or beyond.

There is one wonderful body, one

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

Kingdom of God. Through every region of it, militant, suffering, triumphant, course life-giving currents of common sympathy and common grace. Part is closely bound to part; and neither sorrow, nor pain, nor death can dissolve the strong bond of fellowship uniting member with member. As the Christian can never rejoice, so he can never suffer, entirely alone. Whether he lives or whether he dies, he is a member of Christ's Body, so to remain throughout eternity.

This Catholic conception of solidarity is immeasurably beyond the highest hope of humanitarianism. In contrast with ambition and selfishness, it sets up the divinely beautiful ideal of charity. It reveals in the soul of the Christian a depth and a constancy of affection such as reason of itself could neither anticipate nor comprehend. It preaches the interdependence of man with man so im-

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

pressively that the poorest cannot excuse himself by pleading inability to aid, nor can the strong soul say to the weak, "I have no need of thee." When the Hand of the Lord has touched us, then we are glad to call any man friend; we beseech each passer-by to have pity on us; and we no longer feel it beneath our dignity to beg for a drop of cooling water from the beggar who once lay at our gates.

Looking forward to a condition of helpless suffering as the inevitable, even though temporary, lot of all who finally enter the approaches of eternal life, the Catholic learns valuable lessons about human equality. He perceives how literally and how strikingly God puts down the mighty and exalts the humble. He understands how intimate a sympathy pervades the human members of Christ's Body. And though we dare not say that always and in all circumstances this les-

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

son is assimilated by the individual Catholic, we can assert, without fear of challenge or denial, that the teaching in question is a strong influence for good in the lives of those who appreciate its implications and follow the impulses it suggests.

We who believe this teaching of the Church, then, can say, without a shadow of insincerity:

“Those we love truly never die.”

In reinforcement of our nature's aspiration there comes the solemn pronouncement of the defining Church, purifying and ennobling our purest and noblest loves, until the sacred influence of a union transcending time and space and the things of the flesh brings into our lives something of the peace and holiness of heaven. Amid cries of lamentation there resounds again an echo of the promise, “He shall not taste death forever.”

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

Supported on the broad bosom of the Church, which defies the power of death, we feel comforted and consoled amid the heaviest of human afflictions. Permeated with a sense of those wholesome teachings which are held up for our careful study, we are able to shape our souls into at least a rough conformity with the spirit of Christ and to bow resignedly to God's judgments.

Although the effect of the Church's teaching in this matter be not plain in the life of each one of her children, yet, on the whole, the general consequence of her influence is easily discernible. Who else is so brave as the Catholic at the approach of death, so reverent at the awful moment when the soul departs, so tender and so constant in the care of the mortal frame which has been the dwelling place of a still living soul? Who else remembers the dead as the Catholic does? What other mourner possesses

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

ties so consoling and so intimate as the Catholic praying for his beloved?

It has been given to this generation to witness some very striking instances of human craving for communion with the dead. To wish for an assurance that the dead are still *our* dead, to seek hungrily for a way of reaching out beyond the intolerable confines of this petty world, to long with quenchless longing that some act of ours may avail to satisfy some desire of theirs—these are the yearnings common to all on whom bereavement lays its heavy hand.

Spiritism in its thousand forms is an attempt to meet this real need. But spiritism has not been justified in its results, nor can it ever be more than a poor substitute for that wholesome consolation which has always been within the reach of the Catholic Christian.

Here again we have an instance of what the Church does for her children so

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

many times and in such various ways—she realizes the ideal, she makes concrete and tangible and attainable what mystic and poet have dreamed and sung about for ages. That quenchless desire of noblest natures to commune with and to assist the departed is not only recognized by the Church, but met and satisfied.

Look around, and on every hand you will see men and women whose aspirations have been guided, as they have been ennobled, by this teaching of the Catholic religion; for generous response to the Church's suggestion ever brings practical definite moral benefit. Often our eyes are lifted from the trying scenes of earth to that province of Christ's Kingdom which lies beyond; often the music of invisible choirs imparts to us a thrill of inspiration; often we are strengthened and saved by the conviction that the thoughts we conceive and

DO THE DEAD LIVE ?

the deeds we do will affect not only our own private destiny, but the happiness of those who have gone before.

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