

2014 CIOFS Program for Ongoing Formation
Theme VII: St. Ludwig and Our Sister Bodily Death¹



"The king was so filled with the spirit of charity that although many tried to dissuade him because of the danger, he would willingly go to visit the sick even if (he was) suffering in agony. He would offer them words of consolation and much needed advice." (*Guillaume de Chartres, De Vita et de miraculis*)

"May God, in his great generosity, grant us, to you and to me, that after this mortal life, we will be able to unite with Him for eternal life to see Him, love Him and praise Him forever." (*Teachings of St. Louis to his son Philip*)

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: "ST. LOUIS, OR THE CONCERN OVER A GOOD DEATH"

In the thirteenth century, death was an ever-present reality in everyday life and, unlike today, it was never hidden. Earthly life was seen as a pilgrimage intended to lead to heaven. Since death is the end of this pilgrimage, it is essential to live it well, to die (well); that is, to be united with God, after having confessed and received absolution. On the contrary, the obsession of pious men of that time was (the fear) of being suddenly caught by death without being able to receive the last sacraments.

Two deaths marked the life of St. Louis: the death of his mother, which occurred while he was away to join the crusade, and that of his son, Jean-Tristan, which took place a few days before his own death. St. Louis has always shown a supernatural view of death and he experienced this grief by having Masses celebrated for the repose of the two deceased, entrusting them to the prayer of Religious and practicing a personal penance. (cf. G.C. 27, Rule 19)

Since the illness that led to his death lasted several days, St. Louis had a chance to become aware of its approach. In this period he prayed even more than usual and tried to be closely united to God by also having a crucifix put at the foot of his bed so that he could always have the Lord's Passion visible. The holiness of his death hit everyone, and was one of the key elements in the process of canonization.

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE: "TO LIVE WELL AND TO DIE WELL"

When he learned of his mother's death, St. Louis manifested deep pain and he cried for her a lot. The sadness caused by the death of a parent and faith in his/her resurrection coexist. Do we allow ourselves to be deeply moved just as Christ was at Lazarus' tomb?

St. Louis gave great importance to health and transmitted his attitude to his children. And we, how are we attentive to the balance of our lives, taking care of our body that, according to St.

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Louis, is "our best friend"? How do we live and what care do we show towards our body during illness?

St. Louis practiced the "works of mercy" abundantly toward the poor and the sick, and he insisted on the importance of visiting those who suffer. Today, there is all the more reason and it is very important to visit those that illness or old age exclude from society.

It is one of the most fundamental acts that we can do. How do we do it? (cf. GC 53.3)

FROM ST. LOUIS TO TODAY...

Time for sharing: here are some questions designed to encourage the exchange.



Being in the world

Are we available to visit the lonely, sick or elderly? Is there that special call that comes to us today: how do we act concretely to be close to those who live the loss of a loved one?

Sacrament

Sacrament of the Sick: How do we consider this sacrament, proposed for the hour of great fragility, and the claim that the grace it dispenses accompanies the sick person in the trial? (Cf. Pope Francis, General Audience, Feb. 26, 2014)

Following Christ

"Living one's death united to God"; "Joining the Passion of Christ" ... What do these words so dear to St. Louis say to us? Do we understand them? Do they still have meaning for us?

Spiritual Life

How is our memory marked by the death of those we have known, family or friends?

Do we dare share, with modesty and simplicity, our thoughts about death - that of others and our own? What are our fears and our hopes in the face of death?

Formation

Christian Revelation speaks of the "Four Last Things" (heaven, hell, purgatory, judgment ...) Do I believe in it? What do I do to feed my mind on these subjects?

What does the term "live well and die well" mean for me, today?

LIVING THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

To all of you, brothers in trial, who are visited by suffering under a thousand forms, the council has a very special message. It feels your pleading eyes fixed on itself, burning with fever or hollow with fatigue, questioning eyes which search in vain for the why of human suffering and which ask anxiously when and whence will come relief.



Very dear brothers, we feel your laments and your complaints echoing deeply within our hearts as fathers and pastors. Our suffering is increased at the thought that it is not within our power to bring you bodily help nor the lessening of your physical sufferings, which physicians, nurses and all those dedicated to the service of the sick are endeavoring to relieve as best they can.

But we have something deeper and more valuable to give you, the only truth capable of answering the mystery

of suffering and of bringing you relief without illusion, and that is faith and union with the Man of Sorrows, with Christ the Son of God, nailed to the cross for our sins and for our salvation.

Christ did not do away with suffering. He did not even wish to unveil to us entirely the mystery of suffering. He took suffering upon Himself and this is enough to make you understand all its value. All of you who feel heavily the weight of the cross, you who are poor and abandoned, you who weep, you who are persecuted for justice, you who are ignored, you the unknown victims of suffering, take courage. You are the preferred children of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of hope, happiness and life. You are the brothers of the suffering Christ, and with Him, if you wish, you are saving the world.

This is the Christian science of suffering, the only one which gives peace. Know that you are not alone, separated, abandoned or useless. You have been called by Christ and are His living and transparent image. In His name, the council salutes you lovingly, thanks you, assures you of the friendship and assistance of the Church, and blesses you. (*Message of St. Pope Paul VI to the poor, sick and all those who suffer, Dec. 8, 1965*)

LIVING THE WORD OF GOD (1 Thes 4: 13-14.17d-18)

Jesus, we believe in him, he died and rose again

Brothers and sisters, we do not want to leave you in ignorance about those who have died, because you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

In fact, we believe that Jesus died and rose again; thus it is with those who are dead, God will assemble them with Him through Jesus. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

