Death’s Duel

by

JOHN DONNE

1630
John Donne - The Last Sermon

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TO THE READER

[Preface to the 1st edition (1632) by Richard Redmer, the publisher.]

This Sermon was, by Sacred Authority, stiled the Authors owne funeral Sermon. Most fitly: whether wee respect the time, or the matter. It was preached not many dayes before his death; as if, having done this, there remained nothing for him to doe, but to die: And the matter is, of Death; the occasion and subject of all funerall Sermons. It hath beene observed of this Reverent Man, That his Faculty in Preaching continually encreased: and, That as hee exceeded others at first; so, at last hee exceeded himselfe. This is his last Sermon; I will not say, it is therefore his best; because, all his were excellent. Yet thus much: A dying Mans words, if they concerne our selves, doe usually make the deepest impression, as being spoken most feelingly, and with least affectation. Now, whom doth it not concerne to learn, both the danger, and benefit of death? Death is every mans enemy, and intends hurt to all; though to many, hee be occasion of greatest goods. This enemy wee must all combate dying; whom hee living did almost conquer; having discovered the utmost of his power, the utmost of his cruelties May wee make such use of this and other the like preparatives. That neither death, whenssoever it shall come, may seeme terrible; nor life tedious, how long soever it shall last. R.
DEATH’S DUEL

PSALME 68. VERS. 20. In finè. And unto God the (LORD) belong the issues of death. i.e. From death.

BUILDINGS Stand by the benefit of their foundations that sustaine and support them, and of their butteresses that comprehend and embrace them, and of their contigations that knit and unite them: The foundations suffer them not to sinke, the butteresses suffer them not to swerve, and the contignation and knitting suffers them not to cleave; The body of our building is in the former part of this verse: It is this; hee that is our God is the God of salvation; ad salutes, of salvations, in the plurall, so it is in the original; the God that gives us spirituall and temporall salvation too. But of this building, the foundation, the butteresses, the contignations are in this part of the verse, which constitutes our text, and in the three divers acceptations of the words amongst our expositors. Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. For first the foundation of this building, (that our God is the God of all salvations) is laid in this; That unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death, that is, it is in his power to give us an issue and deliverance, even then when wee are brought to the jaws and teeth of death, and to the lippes of that whirlepoole, the grave. And so in this acceptation, this exitus mortis, this issue of death is liberatio à morte, a deliverance from death, and this is the most obvious and Most ordinary acceptation of these words, and that upon which our translation laies hold, The issues from death. And then secondly the butteresses that comprehend and settle this building, That hee that is our God, is the God of all salvations, are thus raised; Unto God the Lord belong the issues of death, that is, the disposition and manner of our death: what kinde of issue and transmigration wee shall have out of this world, whether prepared or sudden, whether violent or naturall, whether in our perfect senses or shaken and disordered by sicknes; there is no condemnation to bee argued out of that, no judgement to bee made upon that, for howsoever they dye, precious in his sight is the death of his saints, and with him are the issues of death, the wayes of our departing out of this life are in his hands. And so in this sense of the words, this exitus mortis, the issue of death, is liberatio in morte, A deliverance in death; Not that God will deliver us from dying, but that hee will have a care of us in the houre of death, of what kinde soever our passage be. And in this sense and acceptation of the words, the naturall frame and contexture doth well and pregnantly administre unto us: And then lastly the contignation and knitting of this building, that hee that is our God is the God of all salvations, consists in this, Unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death, that is, that this God the Lord having united and knit both natures in one, and being God, having also come into this world, in our flesh, he could have no other meanes to save us, hee could have no other issue out of this world, nor returne to his former glory, but by death; And so in this sense, this exitus mortis, this issue of death, is liberatio per mortem, a deliverance by death, by the death of this God our Lord Christ Jesus. And this is Saint Augustines acception of the words, and those many and great persons that have adhered to him. In all these three lines then, we shall looke upon these words; First, as the God of power, the Almighty Father rescues his servants from the jaws of death: And then as the God of mercy, the glorious Sonne rescued us, by taking upon himselfe this issue of death: And then betweene these two, as the God of comfort, the holy Ghost rescues us from all discomfort by his blessed impressions before hand, that what manner of death soever be ordened for us, yet this exitus mortis shall bee introitus in vitam, our issue in death shall be an entrance into everlasting life. And these three considerations, our deliverance à morte, in morte, per mortem, from death, in death, and by death, will abundantly doe all the offices of the foundations, of the butteresses, of the contignation of this our building; That he that is our God, is the God of all salvations, because unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death.

First, then, we consider this exitus mortis, to bee liberatio à morte, that with God the Lord are the issues of death, and therefore in all our deaths, and deadly calamities of this life, wee may justly hope of a good issue from him. And all our periods and transitions in this life, are so many passages from death to death; our very birth and entrance into this life, is exitus à morte, an issue from death, for in our mothers
wombe wee are dead so, as that wee doe not know wee live, not so much as wee doe in our sleepe, neither is there any grave so close, or so putrid a prison, as the wombe would be unto us, if we stayed in it beyond our time, or dyed there before our time. In the grave the wormes does not kill us, wee breed and feed, and then kill those wormes which wee our selves produc’d. In the wombe the dead child kills the Mother that conceived it, and is a murtherer, nay a parricide, even after it is dead. And if wee bee not dead so in the wombe, so as that being dead wee kill her that gave us our first life, our life of vegetation. yet wee are dead so, as Davids Idols are dead. In the wombe wee have eyes and see not, eares and heare not; There in the wombe wee are fitted for workes of darkness all the while deprived of light: And there in the wombe wee are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood, and may be damned, though we be never borne. Of our very making in the wombe, David sayes, I am wonderfully and fearefully made, and, Such knowledge is too excellent for me, for even that is the Lords doing, and it is wonderfull in our eyes; Ipse fecit nos, it is hee that hath made us, and not wee our selves nor our parents neither; Thy hands have made me and fashioned me round about, saith Job, and (as the original word is) thou hast taken paines about me, and yet, sayes he, thou doest destroy me. Though I bee the Master-peece of the greatest Master (man is so), yet if thou doe no more forme, if thou leave me where thou madest mee, destruction will follow. The wombe which should be the house of life, becomes death it selfe, if God leave us there. That which God threatens so often, the shutting of the womb, is not so heavy, nor so discomfortable a curse in the first, as in the latter shutting, nor in the shutting of barrenness as in the shutting of weaknesses, when children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

It is the exaltation of misery, to fall from a neare hope of happiness And in that vehement imprecation, the Prophet expresses the highest of Gods anger, give them o Lord, what wilt thou give them? give them a miscarrying wombe. Therefore as soone as wee are men, (that is, inanimated, quickened in the womb) though we cannot our selves, our parents have reason to say in our behalf, wretched man that he is, who shall deliver him from this body of death? for even the wombe is a body of death, if there bee no deliverer. It must be he that said to Jeremy, Before I formed thee I knew thee, and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee. Wee are not sure that there was no kinde of shippe nor boate to fish in, nor to passe by, till God prescribed Noah that absolute form of the Arke. That word which the holy Ghost by Moses useth for the Arke, is common to all kinde of boates, Thebah, and is the same word that Moses useth for the boate that he was exposed in, That his mother layed him in an arke of bulrushes. But we are sure that Eve had no Midwife when she was delivered of Cain therefore shee might well say, possedi virum à Domino, I have gotten a man from the Lord, wholly, entirely from the Lord; It is the Lord that enabled me to conceive, The Lord that infus’d a quickening soule into that conception, the Lord that brought into the world that which himself had quickened, without all this might Eve say, My body had bene but the house of death, and Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, to God the Lord belong the issues of death.

But then this exitus a morte, is but introitus in mortem this issue, this deliverance from that death, the death of the wombe, is an entrance, a delivering over to another death, the manifold deathes of this world. Wee have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up in that winding sheet, for wee come to seeke a grave; And as prisoners discharged of actions may lie for fees, so when the wombe hath discharged us, yet we are bound to it by cordes of flesh by such a string, as that wee cannot goe thence, nor stay there; wee celebrate our owne funeralls with cries, even at our birth; as though our threescore and ten years life were spent in our mothers labour, and our circle made up in the first point thereof, we begge our Baptisme, with another Sacrament, with teares; And we come into a world that lasts many ages, but wee last not; in domo Patris, says our Saviour, speaking of heaven, multæ mansiones, there are many mansions, divers and durable, so that if a man cannot possesse a martyrs house, (he hath shed no blood for Christ) yet hee may have a
Confessors, he hath bene ready to glorifie God in the shedding of his blood. And if a woman cannot possess a virgins house (she hath embrac’d the holy state of mariage) yet she may have a matrons house, she hath brought forth and brought up children in the feare of God. In domo patris, in my fathers house, in heaven there are many mansions; but here upon earth the sonne of man hath not where to lay his head, sayes he himselfe. Nonne terram dedit filiis hominum? how then hath God given this earth to the sonnes of men? hee hath given them earth for their materialls to bee made of earth, and hee hath given them earth for their grave and sepulture, to returne and resolve to earth, but not for their possession: Here wee have no continuing city, nay no cottage that continues, nay no persons, no bodies that continue. Whatsoever moved Saint Jerome to call the journies of the Israelites, in the wilderness mansions; The word (the word is Nasang) signifies but a journey, but a peregrination. Even the Israel of God hath no mansions; but journies, pilgrimages in this life. By that measure did Jacob measure his life to Pharaoh; the dayes of the years of my pilgrimage. And though the Apostle would not say morimur, that, whilst wee are in the body wee are dead, yet hee sayes, Peregrinamur, whilst wee are in the body, wee are but in a pilgrimage, and wee are absent from the Lord; hee might have said dead, for this whole world is but an universall churchyard, but one common grave, and the life and motion that the greatest persons have in it, is but as the shaking of buried bodies in the grave, by an earth-quake. That which we call life, is but Hebdomada mortium, a weeke of deaths, seaven dayes, seaven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seaven times over; and there is an end. Our birth dies in infancy, and our infancy dies in youth, and youth and the rest die in age, and age also dies, and determines all. Nor doe all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth arise so, as a Phoenix out of the ashes of another Phoenix formerly dead, but as a waspe or a serpent out of a caryon, or as a Snake out of dung. Our youth is worse than our infancy, and our age worse than our youth. Our youth is hungry and thirsty, after those sinnes, which our infancy knew not; And our age is sory and angry, that it cannot pursue those sinnes which our youth did; and besides, al the way, so many deaths, that is, so many deadly calamities accompany every condition, and every period of this life, as that death it selfe would bee an ease to them that suffer them: Upon this sense doth wee wee are dead, yet hee sayes, Peregrinamur, whilst wee are in the body, wee are but in a pilgrimage, and wee are absent from the Lord; hee might have said dead, for this whole world is but an universall churchyard, but one common grave, and the life and motion that the greatest persons have in it, is but as the shaking of buried bodies in the grave, by an earth-quake. That which we call life, is but Hebdomada mortium, a weeke of deaths, seaven dayes, seaven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seaven times over; and there is an end. 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I should have beene as though I had not beene. And not only the impatient Israelites in their murmuring (would to God wee had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt) but Eliah himselfe, when he fled from Jesabell, and went for his life, as that text sayes, under the Juniper tree, requested that hee might die, and said, it is enough now, 0 Lord, take away my life. So Jonah justifies his impatience, nay his anger towards God himselfe. Now ô Lord take, I beseech thee, my life from mee, for it is better to die than to live. And when God asked him, doest thou well to be angry for this, he replies, I doe well to be angry, even unto death. How much worse a death than death, is this life, which so good men would so often change for death! But if my case bee as Saint Paules case, quotidiè morior, that I die dayly, that something heavier than death falls upon me every day; If my case bee Davids case, tota die mortificamur; all the day long wee are killed, that not onely every day, but every houre of the day some thing heavier than death falls upon me, though that bee true of me, Conceptus in peccatis, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sinne did my mother conceive me, (there I dyed one death), though that be true of me (Natus filius irae) I was borne not onely the child of sinne, but the child of wrath, of the wrath of God for sinne, which is a heavie death: Yet Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, with God the Lord are the issues of death, and after a Job, and a Joseph, and a Jeremie, and a Daniel, I cannot doubt of a deliverance. And if no other deliverance conduce more to his glory and my good, yet he hath the keys of death, and hee can let me out at that dore, that is, deliver me from the manifold deaths of this world, the omni die and the tota die, the every days death and every houres death, by that one death, the finall dissolution of body and soule, the end of all. But then is that the end of all? Is that dissolution of body and soule, the last death that the body shall suffer? (for of spirituall death wee speake not now) It is
not. Though this be exitus a morte. It is introit in mass; though it bee an issue from the manifold deaths of this world, yet it is an entrance into the death of corruption and putrefaction and vermiculation and incineration, and dispersion in and from the grave, in which every dead man dies over againe. It was a prerogative peculiar to Christ, not to die this death, not to see corruption: what gave him this privilege? Not Josephs great proportion of gummies and spices, that might have preserved his body from corruption and incineration longer than he needed it, longer than three days, but would not have done it for ever: what preserved him then? did his exemption and freedome from original sin preserve him from this corruption and incineration? 'tis true that original sin hath induced this corruption and incineration upon us; If wee had not sinned in Adam, mortality had not put on immortality, (as the Apostle speaks) nor, corruption had not put on incorruption, but we had had our transmigration from this to the other world, without any mortality, any corruption at all. But yet since Christ took sinne upon him, so farre as he did mortal, he had it so farre too, as might have made him see this corruption and incineration, though he had no original sin in himself; what preserv’d him then? Did the hypostatical union of both natures, God and Man, preserve him from this corruption and incineration? 'tis true that this was a most powerfull embalming, to be embalmed with the divine nature itselfe, to bee embalmd with eternity, was able to preserve him from corruption and incineration for ever. And he was embalmd so, embalmd with the divine nature it selfe, even in his body as well as in his soule; for the Godhead, the divine nature did not depart, but remained still united to his dead body in the grave; But yet for al this powerful embalming, this hypostatical union of both natures, we see Christ did die; and for all this union which made him God and Man, hee became no man (for the union of the body and soule makes the man, and hee whose soule and body are separated by death as long as that state lasts is properly no man.) And therefore as in him the dissolution of body and soule was no dissolution of the hypostatical union; so is there nothing that constraines us to say, that though the flesh of Christ had seen corruption and incineration in the grave, this had bene any dissolution of the hypostatical union, for the divine nature, the Godhead might have remained with all the Elements and principles of Christs body, as well as it did with the two constitutive parts of his person, his body and his soul. This incorruption then was not in Josephs gummies and spices, nor was it in Christs innocency, and exemption from original sin, nor was it (that is, it is not necessary to say it was) in the hypostatical union. But this incorruptibleness of his flesh is most conveniently plac’d in that, Non dabis, thou wilt not suffer thy holy one to see corruption. Wee looke no further for causes or reasons in the mysteries of religion, but to the will and pleasure of God: Christ himselfe limited his inquisition in that ita est, even so Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight. Christs body did not see corruption, therefore, because God had decreed it shold not. The humble Soule (and onely the humble Soule is the religious Soule) rests himselfe upon Gods purposes and the decrees of God, which he hath declared and manifested not such as are conceived and imagined in our selves, though upon some probability, some veresimilitude. So in our present case Peter proceeds in his Sermon at Jerusalem, and so Paul in his at Antiock. They preached Christ to have bene risen without seeing corruption not onely because God had decreed it, but because he had manifested that decree in his Prophet. Therefore doth Saint Paul cite by speciall number the second Psalme for that decree; And therefore both Saint Peter and S. Paul cite for it that place in the 16. Psalme, for when God declares his decree and purpose in the expresse words of his Prophet, or when he declares it in the real execution tion of the decree, then he makes it ours, then he manifests it to us. An therefor as the Mysteries of our Religion, are not the objects of our reason, but by faith we rest on Gods decree and purpose. (It is so δ God, because it is thy will, it should be so) so Gods decrees are ever to be considered in the manifestation thereof. All manifestation is either in the word of God, or in the execution of the decree; And when these two concur and meete, it is the strongest demonstration that can bee: when therefore I finde those markes of adoption and spiritual filiation, which are delivered in the word of God to be upon me, when I finde that reall execution of his good purpose upon
me, as that actually I doe live under the obedience, and under the conditions which are evidences of adoption and spiritual filiation; Then so long as I see these markes and live so; I may safely comfort my selfe in a holy certitude and a modest infallibility of my adoption. Christ determines himself in that, the purpose of God was manifest to him: S. Peter and S. Paul determine themselves in those two ways of knowing the purpose of God, the word of God before, the execution of the decree in the fulnes of time. It was prophecyed before, say they, and it is performed now, Christ is risen without seeing corruption. Now this which is so singularly peculiar to him, that his flesh should not see corruption, at his second coming, his coming to Judgement, shall extend to all that are then alive, their flesh shall not see corruption, because as th’Apostle sayes, and sayes as a secret, as a mystery; Behold I shew you a mistery, we shall not all sleepe, (is not, continue in the state of the dead in the grave), but wee shall all be changed in an instant, we shall have a dissolution, and in the same instant a redintegration, a recomping of body and soul, and that shall be truly a death and truly a resurrection, but no sleeping in corruption; But for us that die now and sleepe in the state of the dead, we must al passe this posthume death, this death after death, nay this death after buriall, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and Incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave, when these bodies that have beene the children of royall parents, and the parents of royall children, must say with Job, Corruption thou art my father, and to the Worme thou art my mother and my sister. Miserable riddle, when the same worme must bee my mother, and my sister, and my selfe. Miserable incest, when I must bee maried to my mother and my sister, and bee both father and mother to my owne mother and sister, beget and beare that worme which is all that miserable penury; when my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worme shall feed, and feed sweetely upon me, when the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction, if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equall to Princes, for they shall bee equall but in dust. One dyeth at his full strength, being wholly at ease and in quiet, and another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eates with pleasure, but they lye downe alike in the dust, and the worme covers them; In Job and in Esay, it covers them and is spred under them, the worme is spred under thee, and the worme covers thee, There’s the Mats and the Carpets that lie under, and there’s the State and the Canapye, that hangs over the greatest of the sons of men; Even those bodies that were the temples of the holy Ghost, come to this dilapidation, to ruine, to rubbidge, to dust, even the Israel of the Lord, and Jacob himselfe hath no other specification, no other denomination, but that vermis Jacob, thou worme of Jacob. Truely the consideration of this posthume death, this death after buriall, that after God, (with whom are the issues of death) hath delivered me from the death of the wombe, by bringing mee into the world, and from the manifold deaths of the world, by laying me in the grave, I must die againe in an Incineration of this flesh, and in a dispersion of that dust. That that Monarch, who spred over many nations alive, must in his dust lie in a corner of that sheete of lead, and there, but so long as that lead will laste, and that privat and retir’d man, that thought himselfe his owne for ever, and never came forth, must in his dust of the grave bee published, and (such are the revolutions of the graves) bee mingled with the dust of every high way, and of every dunghill, and swallowed in every puddle and pond: This is the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that wee can consider; God seemes to have caried the declaration of his power to a great height, when hee sets the Prophet Ezechiel in the valley of drye bones, and says, Sonne of man can these bones live? as though it had bene impossible, and yet they did; The Lord layed Sinewes upon them, and flesh, and breathed into them, and they did live: But in that case there were bones to bee seene, something visible, of which it might be said, can this thing live? But in this death of incineration, and dispersion of dust, wee see nothing that wee call that mans; If we say, can this dust live? perchance it cannot, it may bee the meere dust of the earth, which never did live, never shall. It may be the dust of that mans worme, which did live, but shall no more. It may bee the dust of another man, that concerns not him of whom it is askt. This death of incineration
and dispersion, is, to naturall reason, the most irrecoverable death of all, and yet Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, unto God the Lord belong the issues of death, and by recompaing this dust into the same body, and reinanimating the same body with the same soule, hee shall in a blessed and glorious resurrection give mee such an issue from this death, as shal never passe into any other death, but establish me into a life that shall last as long as the Lord of life himself.

And so have you that that belongs to the first acceptance of these words, (unto God the Lord belong the issues of death) That though from the wombe to the grave and in the grave it selfe wee passe from death to death, yet, as Daniel speaks, the Lord our God is able to deliver us, and hee will deliver us.

And so wee passe unto our second accommodation of these words (unto God the Lord belong the issues of death) That it belongs to God, and not to man to passe a judgement upon us at our death, or to conclude a derelection on Gods part upon the manner thereof.

Those indications which the Physicians receive, and those presagitions which they give for death or recovery in the patient, they receive and they give out of the grounds and the rules of their art: But we have no such rule or art to give a presagination of spiritual death and damnation upon any such indication as wee see in any dying man; wee see often enough to be sory, but not to despare; wee may bee deceived both ways; wee use to comfort our selfe in the death of a friend, if it be testified that he went away like a Lambe, that is, without any reluctation. But, God knowes, that [he] may bee accompanied with a dangerous damp and stupfaction, and insensibility of his present state. Our blessed Saviour suffered coluctions with death, and a sadnes even in his soule to death, and an agony even to a bloody sweate in his body, and expostulations with God, and exclamations upon the crosse. He was a devout man, who said upon his death bed, or dead turfe (for bee was an Heremit) septuaginta annis Domino servivisti, et mori times? hast thou served a good Master threescore and ten yeares, and now art thou loath to goe into his presence? yet I-lilarion was loath; Barlaam was a devout man (an Heremit too) that said that day hee died. Cogita te hodie ccepisse servire Domino, et hodie finiturum. Consider this to be the first days service that ever thou didst thy Master, to glorifie him in a Christianly and a constant death, and if thy first day be thy last day too, how soone dost thou come to receive thy wages? yet Barlaawt could have beene content to have staid longer for it: Make no ill conclusions upon any mans loatkenes to die, for the mercies of God worke momentarily in minutes, and many times insensibly to bystanders or any other than the party departing. And then upon violent deaths inflicted, as upon malefactors, Christ himselfe hath forbidden us by his owne death to make any ill conclusion; for his owne death had those impressions in it; He was reputed, he was executed as a malefactor, and no doubt many of them who concurred to his death, did beleive him to bee so; Of sudden death there are scarce examples to be found in the scriptures upon good men, for death in bataile cannot be called sudden death; But God governes not by examples, but by rules, and therefore make no ill conclusion upon sudden death nor upon distempers neither, though perchance accompanied with some words of diffidence and distrust in the mercies of God: The tree lies as it falles its true, but it is not the last stroake that fells the tree, nor the last word nor gaspe that qualifies the soule. Stil pray wee for a peaceable life against violent death, and for time of repentance against sudden death, and for sober and ntedest assurance against distempered and diffident death, but never make ill conclusions upon persons overtaken with such deaths; Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, to God the Lord belong the issues of death. And he received Sampson, who went out of this world in such a nianiter (consider it actively, consider it passively in his owne death, and in those whom he slew with himself e) as was subject to interpretation hard enough. Yet the holy Ghost hath moved S. Paul to celebrate Sampson in his great Catalogue, and so doth all the Church: Our critical day is not the very day of our death: but the whole course of our life. I thanke him that prays for me when the Bell tolls, but I thank him much more that Catechises mee, or preaches to mee, or instructs mee how to live. Fac hoc et vives, there’s my securities the mouth of the Lord hath said it, doe this and thou shalt live: But though I doe it, yet I shall die too,
die a bodily, a naturall death. But God never mentions, never seems to consider that death, the bodily, the naturall death. God doth not say, live well and thou shalt die well. that is, an easie, a quiet death But live well here, and thou shalt live well for ever. As the first part of a sentence pieces wel with the last, and never respects, never hearkens after the parenthesis that cor.,ies betweene, so doth a good life here flowe into an eternall life, without any consideration, what manner of death wee dye: But whether the gate of my prison be opened with an oyld key (by a gentle and preparing sickness), or the gate bee hewen downe by a violent death , or the gate bee burnt downe by a raging and frantique feaver, a gate into heaven I shall have, for from the Lord is the cause of my life, and with God the Lord are the issues of death. And further wee cary not this second acceptation of the words, as this issue of death is liberatio in morte, Gods care that the soile be safe, what agonies soever the body suffers in the houre of death. But passe to our third part and last part; as this issue of death is liberatio per mortem, a deliverance by the death of another, by the death of Christ. Sufferentiam Job audiisti, et vidisti finem Domini, says Saint James 5. i i. You have heard of the patience of Job, says he, All this while you have done that, for in every man, calamitous, miserable man, a Job speakes; Now see the end of the Lord, saith that Apostle, which is not that end that the Lord propos’d to himselfe (salvation to us) nor the end which he proposes to us (conformitie to him) but see the end of the Lord, saies he, The end, that the Lord himselfe came to, Death and a painefull and a shamefull death. But why did he die? and why die so? Quia Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis (as Saint Augustine interpreting this text anweres that question) because to this God our Lord belong’d the issues of death. Quid aperitus diceretur? says bee there, what can bee more obvious, more manifest than this sense of these words. In the former part of this verse, it is said; He that is our God, is the God of salvation, Deus salvos faciendi, so bee reads it, the God that must save us. Who can that be, says he, but Jesus? for therefore that name was given him, because he was to save us. And to this Jesus, says he, this Saviour, belong the issues of death; Nec oportuit eum de hac vita alios exitus habere quam mortis. Being come into this life in our mortal nature, He could not goe out of it any other way but by death. Ideo dictum, says he, therefore it is said, To God the Lord belong the issues of death; ut ostenderetur moriendo nos salvos facturum, to skew that his way to save us was to die. And from this text doth Saint Isodore prove, that Christ was truely Man, (which as many sects of heretiques denied, as that he was truely God) because to him, though he were Dominus Dominus (as the text doubles it) God the Lord, yet to him, to God the Lord belong’d the issues of death, oportuit eum pati more can not be said, than Christ himselfe says of himselfe: These things Christ ought to suffer, bee had no other way but by death: So then this part of our Sermon must needs be a passion Sermon; since all his life was a continuall passion, all our Lent may well bee a continuall good Friday. Christs painefull life tooke off none of the paines of his death, bee felt not the lesse then for having felt so much before. Nor will any thing that shall be said before, lessen, but rather inlarge the devotion, to that which shall be said of his passion at the time of due solemnization thereof. Christ bled not a droppes the lesse at the last, for having bled at his Circumcision before, nor wil you shed a teare the lesse then, if you shed some now. And therefore bee now content to consider with mee how to this God the Lord belong’d the issues of death. That God, this Lord, the Lord of life could die, is a strange contemplation; That the red Sea could bee drie, That the Sun could stand still, that an Oven could be seaven times heat and not burne, That Lions could be hungry%, and not bite, is strange, miraculously strange, but supernmiraculous that God could die; but that God would die is an exaltation of that. But even of that also it is a superexaltation, that God shold die, must die, and non exitus (said S. Augustine), God the Lord had no issue but by death, and oportuit pati, (says Christ himself), all this Christ ought to suffer, was bound to suffer; Deus ultiunum Deus says David, God is the God of revenges, he wold not passe over the sinne of man unrevenged, unpunished. But then Deus ultiunum libera egit (says that place) The God of revenges workes freely, he punishes, he spares whom he will. And wold he not spare himselfe? he would not: Dilectio fortis ut mors, love is strong as death, stronger, it drew in death that
naturally is not welcom. Si possibile, says Christ, if it be possible, let this Cup passe, when his love expressed in a former decree with his Father had made it impossible. Many waters quench not love, Christ tried many; He was Baptized out of his love, and his love determined not there. He mingled blood with water in his agony and that determined not his love; hee wept pure blood, all his blood at all his eyes, at all his pores, in his flagellation and thornes (to the Lord our God belong’d the issues of blood) and these expressed, but these did not quench his love. Hee would not spare, nay he could not spare himselfe. There was nothing more free, more voluntary, more spontaneous than the death of Christ. ’Tis true, libere egit, he died voluntarily, but yet when we consider the contract that had passed betwixt his Father and him, there was an opportunit, a kind of necessity upon him. All this Christ ought to suffer. And when shall we date this obligation, this opportunit, this necessity? when shall wee say that begun? Certainly this decree by which Christ was to suffer all this, was an eternall decree, and was there any thing before that, that was eternall? Infinite love, eternall love; be pleased to follow, this home, and to consider it seriously, that what liberty soever wee can conceive in Christ, to die or not to die, this necessity of dying, this decree is as eternall as that liberty; and yet how small a matter made bee of this necessity and this dying? His Father calls it but a bruise, and but a bruising of his heele (the serpent shall bruise his heele) and yet that was that, the serpent should practise and compass his death. Himselfe calls it but a Baptisme, as though he were to bee the better for it. I have a Baptisme to be Baptized with, and he was in paine till it was accomplished, and yet this Baptisme was his death. The holy Ghost calls it Joy (for the Joy which was set before him hee induced the Crosse) which was not a joy of his reward after his passion, but a joy that filled him even in the midst of those torments, and arose from him; when Christ calls his Calicem, a Cuppe, and no worse (can ye drink of my Cuppe) he speaks not odiously, not with detestation of it: Indeed it was a Cup, salus mundo, a health to all the world. And quid retribuam, says David, what shall I render to the Lord? answere you with David, accipiam Calicem, I will take the Cup of salvation, take it, that Cup is salvation, his passion, if not into your present imitation, yet into your present contemplation. And behold how that Lord that was God, yet could die, would die, must die, for your salvation. That Moses and Elias talkt with Christ in the transfiguration, both Saint Mathew and Saint Marke tell us, but what they talkt of onely S. Luke, Dicebant excessum ejus, says he, they talkt of his decease, of his death which was to be accomplished at Jerusalem, The word is of his Exodus, the very word of our text, exitus, his issue by death. Moses who in his Exodus had prefigured this issue of our Lord, and in passing Israel out of Egypt through the red Sea, had foretold in that actuall prophesier Christ passing of mankind through the sea of his blood. And Elias, whose Exodus and issue out of this world was a figure of Christs ascension, had no doubt a great satisfaction in talking with our blessed Lord de excessu ejus, of the full consummation of all this in his death, which was to bee accomplished at Jerusalem. Our meditation of his death should be more viscerall and affect us more because it is of a thing already done. The ancient Romans had a certain tendernesse and detestation of the name of death, they could not name death, no, not in their wills. There they could not say Si mori contigerit, but si quid humanitus continget, not if, or when I die, but when the course of nature is accomplished upon me. To us that speake daily of the death of Christ, (he was crucified, dead and buried) can the memory or the mention of our owne death bee irkesome or bitter? There are in these latter times amongst us, that name death freely enough, and the death of God, but in blasphemous oathes and execrations. Miserable men, who shall therefore bee said never to have named Jesus, because they have named him too often. And therefore heare Jesus say, Nescivi vos, I never knew you, because they made themselves too familiar with him. Moses and Elias talkt with Christ of his death, only, in a holy and joyfull sense of the benefit which they and all the world were to receive by that. Discourses of Religion should not be out of curiosity, but to edification. And then they talkt with Christ of his death at that time, when he was in the greatest height of glory that ever he admitted in this world, that is, his transfiguration. And wee are afraid to speake to the great men of this world of their death, but nourish in them
a vaine imagination of immortality, and immutability. But bonum est nobis esse hic (as Saint Peter said there) It is good to dwell here, in this consideration of his death, and therefore transferre wee our taberna-
cle (our devotions) through some of those steps which God the Lord made to his issue of death that day. Take in the whole day from the houre that Christ received the passeover upon Thursday, unto the houre in which hee died the next day. Make this present day that day in thy devotion, and consider what hee did, and remember what you have done. Before hee instituted and celebrated the Sacrament, (which was after the eating of the passeover) hee proceeded to that act of humility, to wash his disciples feete, even Peters, who for a while resisted him; In thy preparation to the holy and blessed Sacrament, hast thou with a sincere humility sought a reconciliation with all the world, even with those that have been averse from it, and refused that reconciliation from thee? If so and not else thou hast spent that first part of his last day, in a conformity with him. After the Sacrament hee, spent the time till night in prayer, in Psalms; Hast thou considered that a worthy receaving of the Sacrament consists in a continuation of holi-
nesse after, as well as in a preparation before? If so, thou hast therein also conformed thy selfe to him, so Christ spent his time till night; At night hee went into the garden to pray, and he prayed prolixius he spent much time, in prayer. How much? Because it is literally expressed, that he prayed there three several times, and that returning to his Disciples after his first prayer, and finding them asleepe said, could ye not watch with me one houre, it is collected that he spent three houres in prayer. I dare scarce aske thee whither thou wentest, or how thou disposedst of thy selfe, when it grew darke and after last night: If that time were spent in a holy recommendation of thy selfe to God, and a submission of thy will to his, It was spent in a conformity to him In that time and in those prayers was his agony and bloody sweat. I will hope that thou didst pray, but not every ordinary and customary prayer, but prayer actually accompanied with shedding of teares, and dispositively in a readines to shed blood for his glory in necessary cases, puts thee into a conformity with him; About midnight he was taken and bound with a kisse. Art thou not too conformable to him in that? Is not that too literally, too exactly thy case? at midnight to have bene taken and bound with a kisse? from thence he was caried back to Jerusalem, first to Annas, then to Caiphas, and (as late as it was) then hee was examined and buffeted, and delivered over to the custody of those officers, from whome he received all those irritions, and violences, the covering of his face, the spitting upon his face, the blasphemies of words, and the smartnes of blows which that Gospell mentions. In which compasse fell that Gallicinium, that crowing of the Cock which called up Peter to his repentance. How thou passedst all that time last night thou knowest. If thou didst any thing that needed Peters teares, and hast not shed them, let me be thy Cock, doe it now, Now thy Master (in the unworthiest of his servants) lookes back upon thee, doe it now; Betimes, in the morning, so soone as it was day, the Jewes held a coun-
sell in the high Priests hall, and agreed upon their evidence against him, and then caried him to Pilate, who was to be his Judge; diddest thou accuse thy selfe when thou wakedst this morning, and wast thou content even with false accusations (that is) rather to suspect actions to have beene sin, which were not, than to smother and justify such as were truly sins? then thou spentst that houre in conformity to him: Pilate found no evidence against him, and therefore to ease himselfe, and to passe a complement upon Herod. Tetrarch of Galilee, who was at that time at Jerusalem (because Christ being a Galilean was of Herods jurisdiction) Pilat sent him to Herod, and rather as a madman than a malefactor, Herod remaun-
ded him (with scornes) to Pilat to proceed against him; And this was about eight of the clock. Hast thou been content to come to this Inquisition, this examination, this agitation, this cribration, this pursuit of thy conscience, to sift it, to follow it from the sinnes of thy youth to thy present sinnes, from the sinnes of thy bed, to the sinnes of thy boorde, and from the substance to the circumstance of thy sinnes? That’s time spent like thy Saviours. Pilot wold have saved Christ, by using the priviledge of the day in his behalfe, because that day one prisoner was to be delivered, but they choose Barrabas. Hee would have saved him from death, by satisfying their fury, with inflicting other torments upon him, scourging and crowning with
thornes, and loading him with many scornful and ignominious contumelies; But they regarded him not, they pressed a crucifying. Hast thou gone about to redeeme thy sinne, by fasting, by Almes, by disciplines and mortifications, in way of satisfaction to the Justice of God? that will not serve, that’s not the right way, wee presse an utter Crucifying of that sinne that governes thee; and that conformes thee to Christ. Towards noone Pilat gave judgement, and they made such hast to execution, as that by noone hee was upon the Crosse. There now hangs that sacred Body upon the Crosse, rebaptized in his owne teares and sweat and embalmed in his owne blood alive. There are those bowells of compassion, which are so conspicuous, so manifested, as that you may see them through his wounds. There those glorious eyes grew faint in their light: so as the Sun ashamed to survive them, departed with his light too. And then that Sonne of God, who was never from us, and yet had now come a new way unto us in assuming our nature, deliverers that soule (which was never out of his Fathers hands) by a new way, a voluntary emission of it into his Fathers hands; For though to this God our Lord, belong’d these issues of death, so that considered in his owne contract, he must necessarily die, yet at no breach or battery, which they had made upon his sacred Body, issued his soule, but emissit, hee gave up the Ghost, and as God breathed a soule into the first Adam, so this second Adam breathed his soule into God, into the hands of God. There wee leave you in that blessed dependancy, to hang upon him that hangs upon the Crosse, there bath in his teares, there suck at his wounds, and lie downe in peace in his grave, till hee vouchsafe you a resurrection, and an ascension into that Kingdome, which hee hath purchas’d for you, with the inestimable price of his incorruptible blood. Amen.