

6th Resumed Sunday after Epiphany (death)

"Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord: Lord hear my voice."

1. Now that we have been living for a while in the Pentapolis, that is, the five cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, we notice that many here die out of due order. Everyone owes God one death for the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. No one can escape this death. But as we all know, some die prematurely. We say, "They died young". In other words, they do not die of old age or natural causes.
2. Not surprisingly, many in this valley die *unnatural* deaths brought on the by the *unnatural* vice that takes its name after the main city of Sodom. It is commonly known that the average lifespan of such citizens is significantly lower than the rest of the population, something like 8 to 20 years less than the average male. Not too long ago the respected physician, Dr. Paul Church, a member of the Harvard Medical School faculty, was fired from his job in a Boston area hospital for pointing out the unhealthy practices of these people, saying, "The evidence is irrefutable that behaviors [in this place] within the homosexual community are unhealthy and high risk for a host of serious medical consequences, including [certain unsavory diseases] STD's, HIV and AIDS, anal cancer, hepatitis, parasitic intestinal infections, and psychiatric disorders." Thank you Dr. Church... for being truthful. Everyone with commonsense knows this sort of behavior is vicious, not just morally, but physically as well, giving rise to new and terribly unforgiving diseases.
3. But there are other forms of death that cause people to die young here. In this valley, as we have previously noted, pleasure is sacred. The citizens here take entertainment to be a right. (Recall that entertainment has to do with feeding the passions rather than recreating the soul. Recreation is legitimate and necessary for building up the soul and refreshing the body so that we can carry out the duties of our state in life. Entertainment, on the other hand, is often very pleasurable to the body but taxing to the mind and soul. Some examples of things entertaining... video games and movies. Things recreative... walking, reading or listening to good books, and playing family games). In any case, entertainment ranks high on the list of pastimes in this valley. It is among the biggest of moneymakers. Not surprisingly, then, many, if not most untimely deaths, are somehow related to entertainment.

4. Think of those you know who died young. Although a number die of various common fatal diseases such as cancer, nevertheless most of the others were either killed on the way to some entertainment event, in midst of entertaining themselves, or were on the way home from being entertained... or were killed by someone seeking entertainment. How deaths result from drunk driving? It is safe to say, many of the citizens here who die of out due order, die in entertainment mode! Do you want to die like that? That is not how the saints died. No wonder, then, in the *Litany of the Saints* we plead to be delivered from an sudden and unforeseen death.
5. But there is still more to consider about death in this smog-filled valley of the Pentapolis, most notably how LUST, one of the major pollutants here, abhors death! Those giving into concupiscence, that is, pleasures of the flesh... do not want to think about or consider death. Why is that? Because such people have made the pleasures of the flesh their reason for existence... something that is sought as much as possible in the present... something sacred even... such that it fully approved by the law and given marriage rites. Since death robs these pleasure seekers of their bodies... of their "amusement parks", they do not want to hear or think about it.
6. Not surprisingly, lustful people do not like being around the dying let alone helping them die a happy death. They make the funerals of relatives as quick and as easy as possible. Thus, the use incineration ...burning... cremation is on the rise, with little or no time for visitation or saying our goodbyes. Warning! In living in this valley, it is important to put in your last will and testament your desires for a proper Requiem. So much living in the Pentapolis!
7. What do the saints say about death? The desert father, St. John Climacus, comes to our aid in support of what we just heard: "Fear of death is a property of nature due to disobedience, but terror of death is a sign of unrepented sins" (Ladder, Step 6). People living in vice, living in sin... are afraid of death... they have been disobedient to the law of God and have not repented. On the other hand, this desert father says, "The remembrance of death brings labors and meditations, or rather, the sweetness of dishonor... they freely withdraw from everything created and

renounce their own will." They are not afraid of losing anything! They are at peace! Thus, he concludes: "a perfect sense of death is free from fear."

8. There is a basic principle of the Christian life being expressed here, namely that *the man who is ready to die, is ready to live*. The Christian who thinks on death, knows what it really is, strives to die with the Lord, to die in a state grace. Something amazing happens to such a believer. He is ready to live... To live as God intended him live. He is ready to live an ordered and virtuous life, according to the divine and natural law of God. This is a secret of the saints. They remembered death and, as it were, died each day. It is why they were saints. It is why they were more alive than those around them, able to work marvels that we still fondly remember today. They were all ready to die!
9. Time and time again Catholic soldiers have proven to be among the world's most brave and reliable. Why so? They were ready to die. Ready to give their all. They had made their peace with God. *The man who is ready to die, is ready to live...* is ready to be heroic!
10. When the little children of Fatima were shown the pit of hell, they started to live as never before. They saw what death looked like, and they became heroic in virtue to the edification of all around them. Their desire for entertainment fell away. *The man who is ready to die, is ready to live*.
11. From the life of St. Martin of Tours, we find an expression of this principle in one of the antiphons from the Roman Breviary. It reads: "O ineffable man! Not defeated by hard work, nor to be defeated by death, *he neither feared to die nor refused to live!*" No wonder such men could even raise the dead back to life!
12. St. Jean Marie Vianney said it like this: "If I already had my foot in heaven and were told to return to earth to work for the conversion of one sinner, I would gladly return; and if, to obtain that end, it were necessary for me to remain here till the world's last day, to get up at midnight and to suffer all that I now suffer (averaging 15 hours/day in the confessional), I would agree to it with all my heart" (Trochu, p. 344). Death was no stranger to him. He did not abhor death! And so, he was willing to live unto the end of the world... even through difficult times like these. *The man who is ready to die, is ready to live*.

13. St. Catherine of Siena actually died for four hours once only to be sent back. This is what she reported: "I saw the torments of the damned and the souls in Purgatory, but there is no words that can adequately describe these. If poor mortals had a glimpse of the least of these torments they would undoubtedly prefer to die ten times over than have to bear such a thing for one day. I was specially struck by the punishment meted out to those who sin in the married state, who do not respect their vows as they should and seek to satisfy their lust." Her spiritual father and biographer Bd. Raymond of Capua then asked: "why this sin, which is no more serious than any other, should be punished so severely. She replied, 'Because the people concerned don't regard it as important and consequently are not sorry for it as they are for the others, and so they succumb to it more readily and frequently... this fault is all too dangerous, however trivial it may seem, because no one who commits it bothers to get remission of it through repentance' (Life, Raymond, ch. vi, p. 192-3 TAN version). Once again we see how lust abhors death. It is the opposite of preparing to meet God. It is practicing for hell. St. Catherine then came back to this valley of death and lived a heroic life for the Lord... not even fearing to work with lepers, black plague victims, and the like. *The man who is ready to die, is ready to live.*
14. St. Thomas More captures much of this in a prayer he wrote, which starts thus: "Give me the Grace, Good Lord" and then he proceeds to list all the things he longs for help to accomplish with God's grace... such as "to set the world at naught. To set the mind firmly on Thee and not to hang upon the words of men's mouths. ... Not to long for worldly pleasures... Gladly to bear my Purgatory here." But more to the point of today's sermon, he prayed: "To have the last thing in remembrance. To have ever before my eyes my death that is ever at hand. To make death no stranger to me. To foresee and consider the everlasting fire of Hell. To pray for pardon before the judge comes..." We see in these petitions how he has prepared himself for death. Now, he goes on to ask for things to make him ready to live a virtuous life. Thus, he prays: "To buy the time again that I have lost. To abstain from vain conversations. To shun foolish mirth and gladness. To cut off unnecessary recreations [i.e., entertainments]. Of worldly substance, friends, liberty, life and all, to set the loss at naught, for the winning of Christ. To think my worst enemies

my best friends, for the brethren of Joseph could never have done him so much good with their love and favor as they did him with their malice and hatred. These minds [things] are more to be desired of every man than all the treasures of all the princes and kings, Christian and heathen, were it gathered and laid together all in one heap. Amen." Want to use your time well? Do away with gossip and sins of the tongue? Turn your back on worldly entertainments and treasures? Forgive even the most hurtful of offenses? Meditate on your death! Have the last thing in remembrance! *The man who is ready to die, is ready to live.*

15. In this valley of the Pentapolis, death is abhorred. It is feared and it is generally ignored because of the grammar... LUST... with its theme song... "LUV is all you need" and its motto of "LUV wins." Let us fight this smog by frequently considering and meditating on our own death... knowing it may be just around the corner. And then we will begin to live.
16. When the priest tends a dying soul, one of his duties is to prepare the mortal man to receive the Apostolic Pardon. To do this, the soul needs to do three things... Invoke the Holy Name of Jesus, plead for mercy and be willing to live or die for the Lord. These can be easily summarized in this little prayer: *"Jesus, for Thee I live. Jesus, for Thee I die. Have mercy on me a sinner."* May this prayer be in our hearts and on our lips as we live our lives... always ready to die...and we will be more willing to live well than ever before. And when the time is right, we will be granted that exit visa with angelic guides. *"Jesus, for Thee I live. Jesus, for Thee I die. Have mercy on me a sinner."*