

# Along the track

## Something to Consider

During the pandemic one of the front-line doctors wrote: *When I ask patients what they want at the end of life, many are genuinely bewildered. "I don't know. I didn't think it would happen to me."*

Even in such drastic times as these, or even in ordinary time, death is not something front of mind. Most people have never considered their death. You may not even want to continue reading this! The doctor continued: *On one hand, this is unbelievable in the literal sense. Everyone must die and we have all lost someone we love. But on the other hand, it is not unbelievable that in a glossy world that craves instant gratification, there is no pressing need to contemplate mortality, and the question of how to conduct ourselves at the end of life becomes so foreign as to be confronting.*

When I was young, it was common to pray for a happy death. It always seemed a contradiction in terms way back then, so I didn't really know what I was praying for. That isn't unusual – when we are young it's about building a future, all about making a life. Death can be dealt with later. The way the After Life was represented was decidedly unattractive, joining the choirs of angels to sing God's praises for eternity. For one who couldn't sing, Life after Death looked like I was destined for the Other Place.

But if we don't face death, we miss out on life and vice versa. At the centre of Jesus' teaching lies a great paradox: *Whoever clings to life will lose it and whoever lets go of life will find it.* What does cling to life mean? It means being preoccupied with what we might see as life – success, wealth, fame, power, position and status and, if we are honest, there is a part of that in all of us. So often, we just keep busy. We lose so much of the joy and wonder of life in the pursuit of what we think will bring us happiness. It is often not till we near the end that we actually let go of all that and find life!

But we are not born just so we can die. Life itself is a joy, it is something worth celebrating every day. Sadly, that often only happens when we mark a loved one's death. We applaud their life, we give thanks that this person was here with us. But why

do we wait until then? Do we acknowledge the gift of each other in life rather than in death? Do we treasure the joys and opportunities that life offers us, do we treasure the ups and downs of life, the special times and the down times that can teach us so much if we are open to learn. So much time can be spent regretting one's own experiences rather than asking what they have taught our innermost soul. Facing death makes everything in life all the more precious since life is no longer taken for granted.

But while we may applaud life itself, its joys and sorrow, its discoveries and its mysteries, the final mystery about life is oneself. It takes a lifetime to work that one out. Pope Benedict XVI put it this way: "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary." But we have to discover that – we have to let life teach us that. In our busyness we can miss the people, the times, the events that show us how true that is – those occasions when we were there when someone needed us, when we were a friend, when we said the right word, when we were able to help, when we found someone who made us feel worthwhile, special, needed. When we discovered a talent, an ability, a gift, something that someone needed. But there are so many things in life that work to make us not believe that – sadnesses, disappointments, times when we fail, times when we have felt unloved particularly by God, or just plain old simple doubt. But when we take time to reflect we can see that others need us just as we need them. We are here for somebody. And when we discover that we really want love, we will find it waiting for us, both in life and in death.

So how to conduct ourselves at the end of life?

There is no fear in love.  
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 Jn 4

Regards  
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