

Encouragement Encouragement

November 2017 – Issue 76

Loss – Temporal and Eternal

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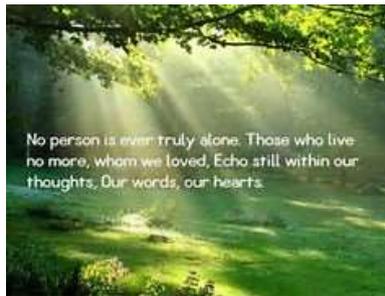
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In many cultures, especially Western, it is seen as unseemly to speak of death. The word 'loss' has replaced it as being a softer and better option, as it directs the sentiment to the effects on the person rather than the finality of the event. While this sounds kinder, in reality it makes it even harder for people to deal with the death of a spouse, relative or friend and the necessity of acceptance of the fact that the only certainty in life is that death will at some point follow it. We are born to die, we will all do so, and it is vital to keep this in mind, not morbidly, but as a pointer to the fact that all things end and have a limited time span.

This month sees the two great feasts of All Saints' and All Souls', a timely reminder both of death and life, for while we die in the physical sense, our souls continue on into eternity. Great Saints have understood this so well, and live every moment in service of God and man, and have been willing to sacrifice their lives for others.

But all of us are called to a life of self-sacrifice, offering our everyday activities as gifts to our Maker. Those who precede us, pray for us, as we have to pray for them, especially in this month of November.

However, 'loss' has many facets and meanings: Is it really a good description of mourning and grieving of a person to say they have 'lost' someone? Surely if we believe in eternal life then we do not lose them, we are simply separated from them for a while, although we may continue to be united in prayer, as indeed is made manifest in the Mass and other Prayers. I came across the following – written anonymously – but which illustrates this point: 'A ship sails and I stand watching 'til she fades on the horizon and someone says "She is gone." "Gone where? Gone from my sight that is all; she is just as large as when I saw her. The diminished size and total loss of sight is *in me*, not her, and just at that moment, when someone at my side says 'She is gone' there are others who are watching her coming and other voices take up the glad shout 'here she comes!'... and that is dying'. What a wonderful way to embrace a passing into eternity as well as journeying.



But to lose something is sometimes to gain something else. Loss is often temporary and not final. In the spiritual life, as the hymn says 'the greatest gain I count as loss, and pour contempt on all my pride' (As I Survey the Wondrous Cross). What sort of things do we lose then, that can cause pain or discomfort, if we let them of course. Some things we say we have 'lost' but have we ever owned them? You can only lose something you feel you have owned. There are things we have had temporary possession of and they finally have to be surrendered. 'All the vain things that charm me most I sacrifice them to His Blood...' (Isaac Watts)

In the Trilogy of 'Lost and found' we have three distinct examples, The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and

The Lost Son. Each bears a significant difference in what has been lost and found. The coin is a thing – but maybe the only treasure left to a widow, the sheep – in the hands of the shepherd, are his special charge, and the lost son (or daughter) found and returned, each showing the Joy of re-finding anew something thought of as lost and when re-instated comes back renewed, whether in relationship or belongings.

So what else do we speak of as lost? We can lose possessions, either through neglect or damage, catastrophe, or by accident. These, while causing difficulty, can be replaced, often through the generosity of others. A loss, in this case, is a gift to the giver and a grace to the loser.

These, then, are the losses which would otherwise give us identity and status - the loss of employment, acclaim, or being well thought of are prime examples. Friendship, camaraderie and company, leading to aloneness also fall into this pattern. These are deeper losses which are very hard to deal with, but if we stand back and look at what they say about us and our attitudes, can help us to grow stronger, more prayerful – more understanding – although they may feel terrible at the time. They can cause great internal strife.

Even deeper are the losses as a result of a breakdown in relationships, in marriage, divorce, illness both physical

"NEVER LOOK AT WHAT YOU HAVE LOST, LOOK AT WHAT YOU HAVE LEFT" ROBERT SCHULLER

and mental, change of identity and of course through death. These losses bite deeply into our need for support and encouragement, affection and love. Yet without minimising the effects which cut so very incisively into our hopes and dreams, when they happen they nevertheless can lead to a greater fulfilment, realisation of self-worth and the Maker's plan for us.

How many valiant men, women and of course children have changed a personal disaster into a means of bringing about change and betterment in other peoples' lives.

Countless organisations and charities, movements and laws have been founded in this way. Nothing is ever lost to the Lord of Hosts. Every action, however seemingly catastrophic or detrimental to us, can become formative if we embrace the loss and surrender it and see God's hand in it.

It is perhaps the things that 'charm us most' that we have sometimes to surrender to Jesus' Blood, for it is these that can lead us to a new realisation of how precious we are to God and that He never 'loses' sight of us.

In this month of prayer for all who have died before us, whether in war, calamity or ordinary life we have to remember that the passing of someone is a transition to a better life for them and can be a transformation for us through prayer, but we also have this promise of God through the Prophet Isaiah that –

**The Lord will wipe away the tear from every cheek,
He will take away the shame everywhere on earth,
We will feast with Him –
Mourning will end.**

Isaiah 25 6-10

Do not let *loss* grind you down, but pass through it to gain so much more, even if it is hard work. In such a way, Saints are made. All through November we can remember all those who have already moved into a place where travail has ended and they can see so much more clearly what we have still to understand. We must not forget that the Saints do carry our petitions to the throne of God. Those souls still 'in transit' however, cannot pray for themselves but for us, and we for them. In this way we become united in the Communion of Faithful people. No loss can separate us from the greatest reality of a life continuing into eternity, one of Joy, if we remain close to Jesus for whom death on the Cross, and the loss of so much, was a small price to pay for us. Let us pray faithfully for all in November.

Halina Holman

Pope Francis.

We live in a world where everything is seen as disposable, replaceable or temporary, and overflowing landfills aren't the only obvious signs. We can look at figurative pathways strewn with broken relationships, forgotten people, abandoned beliefs and dilapidated dreams to find the far-reaching effects of the throwaway mentality.

In the quest for bigger, better, faster, flashier, we have lost sight of what really matters.



Prayer Intention: That Christians in Asia bearing witness to the Gospel in word and deed may promote dialogue, peace and mutual -

understanding, especially with those of other religions.

"In the People of God, by the grace of his compassion granted in Jesus, many families prove by their deeds that death does not have the last word: this is a true act of faith. Every time a family in mourning — even terrible mourning — finds the strength to guard the faith and love that unite us to those we love, it has already prevented death from taking everything. The darkness of death should be confronted with a more intense work of love. 'My God, lighten my darkness!' is the invocation of evening prayer. ...

"We can draw from the simple and strong testimony of the many families who have been able to grasp, in the most arduous transition of death, the safe passage of the Lord, Crucified and Risen, with His irrevocable promise of the resurrection of the dead. God's work of love is stronger than the work of death." Gen. Aud., June 17, 2015

'They lose nothing who gain Christ' *S. Rutherford.*
'I can afford to lose everything except the touch of God in my life' *Richard Baxter*

Feasts in November

1st All Saints - Holy Day of Obligation

2nd All Souls, **3rd St. Martin of Porres,**

9th Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

10th St. Leo the Great (Pope)

11th St. Martin of Tours,

12th Remembrance Sunday

16th St. Margaret of Scotland, 17th St. Elizabeth Hun.

21st Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

22nd St. Cecilia, **24th St. Andrew Dung-Lac,**

26th Christ the King

30th St. Andrew of Scotland