

SOME DEEP THOUGHTS ABOUT DEATH

God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome. And there is not a destructive drug among them nor any domain of the nether world on earth, for justice is undying. For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it. Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Today's first reading is from the *Book of Wisdom*. The passage is tremendously important, addressing one of the deepest questions we all have: Why does Death exist? Did God make death? The *Book of Wisdom* says that God did not create death, nor is he happy about it. All that he created was meant to be wholesome, not containing destructive forces.

Why then does death exist? Well, there are two very wrong yet opposite opinions that people expound on regarding death, pain and suffering. The first is the offensive saying you have heard, "S... happens." I am upset by this saying. There is the inner fatalism involved here that we are the victim of forces beyond our control. The ancients believed that we have no control over our lives and thus have no responsibility for our destiny. Its all in the stars. The *Book of Wisdom* tells us that we do have a certain control over our fate, if we follow God we will be raised up by him. If we turn from him, we turn to death.

The opposite and perhaps most prevalent erroneous opinion on why death exists is pietistic. A wife, husband or child dies and you'll hear people, even priests, saying, "It was God's will." or "He needed another angel in heaven." This is blatantly wrong. God does not will death. And he doesn't need any more angels in heaven; he needs them here on earth. God does not require either human immolation or child sacrifice. We've got to get the concept, "It was God's will" out of our vocabulary when dealing with death. Remember the *Book of Wisdom*, "God did not make death and does not delight in the death of the living."

Why, then, does death exist? Death exists because we can choose good. Think about this. The ability to choose good means that we can choose not to do good, and that's evil. The ability to choose life means that we have the ability to reject life. That's death. Evil does not exist for the creatures who do not have the ability to choose it. Nor does good.

Perhaps you may be saying to yourself, "Then we would be better if we couldn't choose at all." Would we? Do you really wish you were a robot? Do you realize that if you could not choose you could not give and receive love. After all, real love is

a matter of a choice. If people truly love each other they choose each other over others. In fact they even choose each other over themselves. It is really questionable if people who are forced into marriage over circumstances have a real love. You also love your children by making choices for them. You do not spend money lavishly because you choose to provide for your children's future. You don't just love your children because they are cute and cuddly. You love your children because you choose to love them.

The ability to choose results in the ability to love and be loved. It also results in the ability to hate and be hated. God did not create hatred, but he gave us free will which means we have the ability to hate. He created life and gave us the ability to choose life and receive life, but then we also have the ability to choose death and to be victimized by the choices that others make of death. But it is better to love and suffer hatred than to be incapable of ever experiencing love. And it is better to suffer the effects of death than never to live.

God did not create death. Man was made for incorruption, *Wisdom* says. God made us in the image of his own eternity. Those who choose evil have brought death into the world.

Still, life is far more than physical. We believe in the eternal life of the Spirit. We believe that God will raise up all who do his will. The righteous will live forever. Only those who belong to the party of the devil will experience death.

So then, how do we understand death? Death is due to the decision for evil we all suffer from. To fight death we have to choose life continually. At the same time, we recognize that ultimately we will all die, but if we have worked for what is good and right, our death will only be physical. we shall live forever with God.

Death doesn't just happen. Nor is it God's will. It is the effect of evil in the world brought about by the ability to choose. God does not want anyone to die, but he does want us to be able to choose life, and to be able to choose love, even if this means that we can also choose hatred and death.

Today we pray that in times of crises, when the ultimate effect of evil in the world, death, knocks on the door of our homes, for the faith that God who grieves with us will raise up those of us who are determined to choose him.