





# Memento Mori

Prayers on the Last Things

Written and compiled by  
Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP

The logo features a stylized globe with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. A large, bold, serif letter 'P' is superimposed over the globe, with the word 'Pauline' written in a smaller, italicized serif font across the middle of the 'P'.

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*May they rest in peace.*



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# Memento Mori and the Last Things

*MEMENTO MORI* OR “REMEMBER your death” is a phrase long associated with the practice of remembering the unpredictable and inevitable end of one’s life. The spiritual practice of *memento mori* and the symbols and sayings associated with it were particularly popular in the medieval church. But the tradition of remembering one’s death stretches back to the very beginning of salvation history.

After the first sin, God reminds Adam and Eve of their mortality: “You are dust, / and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). God’s words continue to echo throughout the Old Testament, reminding readers of life’s brevity,

while exhorting them to remember their death. The Book of Sirach urges, “In whatever you do, remember your last days, / and you will never sin” (7:36). The Psalmist prays, “Teach us to count our days aright, / that we may gain wisdom of heart” (Ps 90:12). In the New Testament, Jesus exhorts his disciples to pick up their crosses daily and to remember their death as they follow him to the Place of the Skull: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).

Even if one does not believe the Christian message of salvation, the rich, ancient tradition of remembering death can bring joy, focus, and fruitfulness to anyone’s life. However, for the Christian, it is a practice that extends beyond the reality of earthly life and bodily death. Just as death is a doorway to the afterlife, meditation on death is the doorway to meditation on the afterlife, or what have traditionally been called the “Last Things.” Meditation on death as well as judgment, hell, and



heaven has been encouraged in the Church for centuries. Why meditate on these things? Because thinking about the *definite* end of life—death—necessarily leads to the consideration of life's *possible* ends.

Though an essential part of the Christian life, meditation on the Last Things has, unfortunately, become less prevalent in recent years. As early as 1954, Blessed James Alberione, the founder of my religious congregation, the Daughters of St. Paul, noted that people were losing interest in the Last Things. Speaking to our religious sisters he once said:

Nowadays there is little human respect for meditating on the Last Things. They say it is no longer modern to meditate on them. It seems to me, however, that death is always modern. It is active every day! And heaven is always modern, and hell is always modern! Do not let yourselves be taken in by this bad habit.

Alberione's prophetic words are meant for all of us—in every state of life. As Christians, we

must pray with and meditate on death and the afterlife. Many suggest it is old fashioned or unnecessary, but meditation on the Last Things is vital to the Christian life. We should regularly consider these important questions:

*Where am I headed? How are my choices diminishing my humanity and leading me to evil? How are my choices corresponding to God's grace and leading me to what is true and good? Am I living for myself and indulging in my basest desires or am I living for heaven –union with God?*

Holiness requires that we ask ourselves these questions and consider all the possible answers. This prayer book aids in the journey of meditating on death and all of the Last Things. We meditate on death, judgment, hell, and heaven because we are meant for sanctity. We are called to become saints. Heaven is our goal and Jesus has won it for us, but we must not become complacent. Remembrance

of the Last Things, beginning with death, opens our hearts to the work God wants to do in us before our last day on earth.

Remember your death,



*Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP*

## How to Live Memento Mori

REMEMBERING DEATH AND THE afterlife is a deeply personal practice that can bring complex emotions to the surface. This prayer book can aid you in this journey by providing prayers that you can incorporate into your spiritual routine (e.g., during daily prayer, Eucharistic adoration, before or after Mass, in group prayer). *Remember Your Death: Memento Mori Journal* and *Remember Your Death: Memento Mori Lenten Devotional* are other available companion resources that can help you in your journey as well. The journal includes space for writing down your thoughts, and offers inspiring *memento mori* quotes, including some from Scripture, Church Fathers, and the saints. The Lenten devotional includes daily reflections,


writings of the saints, a *Memento Mori* Examen, intercessory prayers, and journaling prompts for each day of Lent.

As you meditate on the Last Things, you will find more fruit in the practice if you also connect with other people in the community of the Church. Talk with family and close friends about your journey. Share your reflections and reactions with the wider online community with the hashtags #mementomori and #livemementomori. No matter what resources you use or how you choose to share your journey, it's most important to devote prayer time to reflection on death and on all of the Last Things. God has something to tell you; be sure to take the time to listen.



The Last Things are ever new truths, powerful incentives, considerations that sanctify. The thought of them casts a brilliant light on life and points out its true meaning. They are sparks which set on fire a tremendous love—a love that consists in striving to reach God, our final goal and Supreme Good. The thought of the Last Things is a prayer with the power to move the most indifferent hearts and inspire souls to generous resolutions. . . . May every reader find in reflection on the Last Things the Way, the Truth and the Life! The lay man or woman, the priest or the religious who builds the spiritual life on the Last Things builds on the most solid foundation: “The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock” (Mt 7:25). *Homo aeternitatis sum!* — “I am a person destined for eternity!”

—BLESSED JAMES ALBERIONE



# Death

## Prayers to Live and to Die Well

*In whatever you do, remember your last days, and you will never sin.*

— SIRACH 7:36





*This section of prayers will help you to meditate on death and prepare for your life's inevitable and unpredictable end.*

DEATH AWAITS EVERY PERSON, whether rich or poor, young or old, believer or nonbeliever. In *City of God*, Saint Augustine described the startling reality of death as “the very violence with which body and soul are wrenched asunder.” A terrifying prospect. So, it’s no wonder most people try to ignore their impending death or assume it is far in the future. However, ignoring death will not make it go away. And it may even increase anxiety—because the fearsome truth is that death could come suddenly and forcefully for anyone at any time. Only God knows when each person will die, so preparation for death is an essential spiritual practice, regardless of age.

Death—whether the natural death of the body or the death of the soul through sin—has always been humanity’s most intimidating enemy and its most impossible adversary. Only

the Creator of the Universe—the One who first brought everything into existence and continues to maintain all living beings in existence—could overcome death. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God humbled himself and took on human flesh in order to defeat death through his own death. Jesus has defeated humanity’s greatest foe—permanent death in sin. All that remains for us to endure is bodily death. And Jesus has transformed even this fearsome reality into the doorway to heaven.

The Cross changes everything. With the triumph of the Cross, remembering one’s death involves not only remembering one’s mortality but also remembering Christ’s victory over death: “Where, O death, is your victory? / Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:55). If we belong to the Lord and have entered into his death and resurrection through Baptism, we need not fear bodily death. However, we also should prepare to meet Jesus and not be taken unawares. Remembering one’s death

not only helps us to live well but also helps us to remember what Christ has done for us. Jesus has trampled death!



It takes but the event of a moment to end our lives—an accident, a fall, a slash of a vein, a stubborn fever, pneumonia, a heart attack and we are gone. Every day the newspapers carry reports of sudden deaths. Some are from internal causes and some from external, such as accidents on land or sea or in the air. The human vessel is a very fragile one. It can break at any moment. At times, one germ is all it takes! In a twinkling, we can pass into eternity. . . . Let us always live in a kind of holy fear, on our guard, watchful, realizing that our body is subject to corruption.

—BLESSED JAMES ALBERIONE