

23rd Sunday after Pentecost (Dead Men Tell No Tales)

“Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live.” ... “Give place; for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. And when the multitude was put forth, He went in and took her by the hand. And the Maid arose.”

1. We have all heard the saying: “Dead men tell no tales.” Hmmm. This saying could be taken in a couple of ways. I suppose the normal sense is this: when a man dies, he can no longer talk... his body is dead. He loses use of his tongue. He can no longer testify in a court of law or confess. Thus gangsters and those who have big secrets to hide assassinate those who threaten to release the secrets. And yet this silence of the dead is not universal. There are many examples from the lives of the saints where dead men came back to speak at crucial moments.
2. Here is one example from the life of St. Stanislaw (d. 1079), bishop of Cracow Poland. A disputed property purchased by the Church was ruled upon unjustly by the vicious King Boleslaw. The problem was this: the previous owner had died three years before and his family wanted the property back. The king not liking the saintly bishop, ruled in their favor... but he was forced to alter his judgment when St. Stanislaw had the previous owner rise up out of the grave, appear in court, and tell the truth. Dead men do tell tales after all. This behooves us to speak truthfully always...does it not??
3. This historical scene leads us to another meaning of this phrase: yes, dead men will speak, if not now, then later ... both in the Universal and Supreme Court of God (something saints have easy access to) and also they will speak at the end of time... when all that is done in secret will be brought to light... There will be no hiding the truth or lying tongues then. There will be no tales, that is, no legends, yarns, fabrications, falsehoods... fables being told any longer. As St. Stanislaus proved, when the dead man testified, there was no doubting... his testimony was definitive.
4. St. Vincent Ferrer is known to have raised 30 people from the dead. Once he was pleading in vain for a man wrongly condemned to death. Soon a grim procession led the poor man to the scaffold, but as they went along they met another procession, that of a funeral. The corpse was being borne on a stretcher to the burial place. Vincent seemed to have a sudden inspiration. He stopped and addressed the corpse: “You no longer

have anything to gain by lying. Is this man guilty? Answer me!" The dead man sat up, then spoke the words: "He is not!" As the man began to settle down again on his stretcher, Vincent offered to reward him for his service by giving him the opportunity of remaining alive on earth. But the man responded, "No, Father, for I am assured of salvation." With that he died again as if going to sleep, and they carried his body off to the cemetery. Dead men tell no tales... fibs... hmhhh.

5. St. Thomas teaches that Christ Our Lord died for a number of reasons... among them is this one: He died so that we might live as already dead with Him. "Christ wished to make clear by His death that we ought so to die in our carnal life that our spirit might be raised to higher things." St. Paul: "You are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). Would that we lived as if our death were ever present to us. Thus, St. Thomas More prayed: "To have ever before my eyes my death that is ever at hand. To make death no stranger to me." St. John of the Cross: "I die because I am not dead."
6. If this were true for us, we would speak well, always truthful. What is more, in living in this way, death would lose its sting... "the sting of death is sin." When living this way, the passage from the Psalms would be fulfilled: "precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His Faithful." Or we could say this other passage from King David would be avoided: "The death of the wicked is very evil" (Ps 33:22). St. Paul says: "It is a frightful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God." If we know Him, love Him and serve Him on the way in this life, our death will not be so frightful... but rather precious.
7. Death has much to teach us. Among other things it teaches us there is indeed an invisible substance called the soul, and it cannot die. Takashi Nagai was born in 1908, at Isumo, near Hiroshima, into a family with five children, of the Shinto religion. In 1928, he entered medical school at Nagasaki. He would write, "Starting in high school, I had become a prisoner of materialism. Right after I started medical school... everything I touched was totally material. The soul? A phantom invented by impostors to fool simple people."
8. One day in 1930, a telegram arrived for him from his father: "Come home!" He departed hastily, with a presentiment of some misfortune. Upon his arrival, he was numbed on learning that his mother had had an attack and that she could no longer speak. He sat beside her and read in her eyes a final "good-bye." This experience of death was to change his

life: "With this final penetrating gaze, my mother demolished the ideological framework that I had constructed. This woman, who had brought me into the world and raised me, this woman who had never had a moment when she did not love me, in the final moments of her life, spoke to me very clearly. Her gaze told me that the human spirit continues to live after death. This all came to me by intuition, an intuition that had the taste of truth." Takashi Nagai then began reading the *Pensées* (Thoughts) of Pascal, a homeschooled French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer of the 17th century who promoted the Catholic Faith. Nagai asked himself over and over: "This incomparable intellect truly believed in these things! What could this Catholic faith be, in order for the intellectual Pascal to accept it, without going against his scientific knowledge?" Pascal explained that we encounter God in faith and prayer. Even if you are not yet a believer, he said, do not neglect prayer or attendance at Mass. "I am always ready to test an hypothesis in the laboratory," Takashi Nagai thought, "why not try this prayer on which Pascal is so insistent." Nagai soon converted, endured the bombing of Nagasaki and became a saintly apologist for the Catholic faith in Japan. He helped many people deal with death all around them! All this because he saw his mother die... death has something to teach us. Dead men do tell tales after all...

9. St. Thomas goes on to teach that Christ died to take away the sting of death... so that we would not be afraid of death if we live in Him... He died to teach us how to be virtuous, not only courageous, patient in suffering and obedient even unto death, but also chaste. In a discussion of the vice of LUST, St. Thomas points out that those under the grip of this sin abhor thoughts of the future or of death. They put these out of their mind and become blinded... They will not want a crucifix on their walls or in their lives. On the other hand, he points out that "certain persons refrain from lustful pleasures chiefly through hope of the glory to come..." When we plan on a good and holy death, a death precious in the sight of God, we refrain from what is sinful! Truly, death can teach us many things... it teaches us how to be virtuous.
10. Finally, all the martyrs, following the example of Our Lord, have shown that death is the best time to show true love. Listen to St. Thomas: "The more numerous and grievous are the sufferings a person does not refuse to bear for his friend, the more strikingly his love is shown forth. But of

all human ills the most grievous is death, by which human life is snuffed out. Hence no greater proof of love is possible than that a man should expose himself to death for a friend." And the saints on the other side are wishing they could come back and die again! Blessed Jordan of Saxony, the second Master General of the Dominicans, wisely observed something about death from the point of the view of the deceased: "Those who are left to live on in this world weep and are sad for the death of their friends who go before them; but those who have died first do not mourn in the other world over the death of those who come after them" (Letter 26 to Diana). On that side, death takes on a different perspective... we could say, they envy the dying... the chance to merit and show the depths of their love once again! To die a 1000 times would not suffice!

11. Death is something that we all must embrace. Nature, during this fall season, gives us a sign of that truth (animals hibernate, plants shed their leaves, days grow short). Death is the great equalizer...it gets everyone... rich, poor, young, old, virtuous and vicious, high and low. Even the great Enoch and Elias still owe God one death and it will indeed come to them as spoken of in the 11th chapter of the Apocalypse. May a healthy and holy view of death not be a stranger to us. May a holy preparation for death be not foreign to us. Let us keep our crucifixes pressed close to our lips and hearts, and ever before our eyes. Let us make our nine first Fridays of reparation to the Sacred Heart, keeping in mind the wonderful promises it gives... namely: "I will be their refuge during life and above all in death." And "I promise you in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on the First Friday in nine consecutive months, the grace of final penitence: they will not die in My disgrace, nor without receiving their Sacraments. My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful!" And we will be among those who have many true tales to tell for God's glory!

12. "Heart of Jesus, hope of those who die in Thee, have mercy on us." The Litany of the saints: "From sudden and unlooked for death, deliver us."