

"I WATCH THE SUNSET AS I LOOK OUT OVER THE RIM OF THE BLUE PACIFIC, AND THERE IS NO MYSTERY BEYOND THE HORIZON LINE, BECAUSE I KNOW WHAT THERE IS OVER THERE. I HAVE BEEN THERE. I HAVE JOURNEYED IN THOSE LANDS, OVER THERE WHERE THE SUN IS SINKING IN JAPAN THAT STAR IS RISING OVER CHINA. IN THAT DIRECTION LIE THE PHILIPPINES. I KNOW ALL THAT. WELL, THERE IS ANOTHER LAND THAT I LOOK TOWARD AS I WATCH THE SUNSET-I HAVE NEVER SEEN IT. I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN THERE, BUT IT HAS A MORE ABIDING REALITY THAN ANY OF THESE LANDS WHICH I KNOW. THIS LAND BEYOND THE SUNSET, THIS LAND OF IMMORTALITY, THIS FAIR AND BLESSED COUNTRY OF THE SOUL - WHY, THIS HEAVEN OF OURS IS THE ONE THING IN THE WORLD WHICH I KNOW WITH ABOLUTE, UNSHAKEN, UNCHANGEABLE CERTAINTY. THIS I KNOW WITH A KNOWLEDGE THAT IS NEVER SHADOWED BY A PASSING CLOUD OF DOUBT. I MAY NOT ALWAYS BE CERTAIN ABOUT THIS WORLD: MY GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS MAY SOMETIMES BECOME CONFUSED, BUT THE OTHER WORLD - THAT I KNOW. AND AS THE AFTERNOON SUN SINKS I LOWER, FAITH SHINES MORE CLEARLY AND HOPE, LIFTING HER VOICE IN A HIGHER KEY, SINGS THE SONGS OF FRUITION. MY WORK IS ABOUT ENDED, I THINK. THE BEST OF IT I HAVE DONE POORLY: ANY OF IT I MIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER, BUT I HAVE DONE IT. AND IN A FAIRER LAND, WITH FINER MATERIAL, AND A BETTER WORKING LIGHT, I WILL DO BETTER WORK."

BENEDICTION

O LORD, SUPPORT US ALL THE DAY LONG OF OUR TROUBLOUS LIFE UNTIL THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN AND THE EVENING COMES, AND THE BUSY WORLD IS HUSHED, AND THE FEVER OF LIFE IS OVER, AND OUR WORK IS DONE. THEN IN THY MERCY GRANT US A SAFE LODGING AND A HOLY REST, AND PEACE AT THE LAST. AMEN.

INVOCATION:

MERCIFUL FATHER, WHO ART STRENGTH TO THE WEAK, REFRESHMENT TO THE WEARY, COMFORT TO THE SAD, HELP TO THE TEMPTED, AND LIFE TO THE DYING: MAKE US, WE PRAY THEE, SENSITIVE TO THE PRESENCE OF THY COMFORT IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR LORD'S ASSURANCE THAT WE WILL NOT BE LEFT ALONE, AND GRANT US THE FAITH OF THE PROPHETS WHO COULD SEE, IN APPROACHING THE SHADES OF NIGHT, THE PROMISE OF GLORIOUS SUNRISE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

SCRIPTURE READING: Psalms 121

Romans 8:35,37-39

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, WHO ART LIKE THE SKY THAT BENDS ABOVE US, AND SURROUNDS ALL THE EARTH, WHO ART THE TRUE AND LASTING LIGHT WHICH SHINES EVEN IN THE TIMES OF OUR SHADOW AND DARKNESS, LOOK UPON THY CHILDREN WITH CONSTANT MERCY, AND GIVE US A SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING PROMISED BY THY DEAR SON. WHEN OUR EYES NO LONGER BEHOLD WHAT WE HAVE LOVED, AND WHEN WE LISTEN FOR FOOTSTEPS OF THOSE WHO HAVE GONE FROM OUR SIGHT AND HEAR THEM NOT, WE CAN BUT TURN TO THEE.

WE THANK THEE FOR THIS LIFE WHICH HAS COME TO ITS FINAL CHANGE MAY IT STILL BE AN INSPIRATION AND GUIDE. MAY THESE WHO HAVE BEEN LOVED BY HER, KEEP IN MIND THAT THEY MUST LOVE AND SERVE THEE MORE BECAUSE SHE IS NOT HERE. MAY THEY SHOW THEIR LOVE FOR HER BY DOING THINGS SHE LOVED THE BEST. MAY THEY BE GENTLER, KINDER, MORE THOUGHTFUL, THUS TO COMPENSATE FOR HER LOSS.

HELP US TO BE GRATEFUL FOR THINE ETERNAL LOVE WHICH SUMMONS SOULS TO REST FROM THEIR LABORS, AND DOST PERMIT THEM ~~AT~~ TO ENTER INTO THY PEACE. AMID THE CHANGES OF THIS WORLD, MAKE US STRONG AND CALM, EAGER TO SERVE, MORE INCLINED TO LOVE, AND PERSUADE US THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR THINGS PRESENT, NOR THINGS TO COME, SHALL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. AMEN.

✓ THE BEAUTY OF THE SUNSET

HAVE YOU EVER SAT ON A HILL AND WATCHED THE SUN GOING DOWN - AND HAS YOUR SOUL THRILLED AT THE BEAUTY OF THE SUNSET? THAT IS WHAT I WANT YOU TO SEE IN THE DEATH TODAY. I LIKE TO THINK OF THIS WORLD AS A PARK FILLED WITH GARDENS AND PLAYGROUNDS, TREES AND LAKES, MUSEUMS AND SWIMMING POOLS. WE ARE LIKE CHILDREN PRIVILEGED TO SPEND A DAY IN THE GREAT PARK. THE TIME WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO SPEND IS NOT THE SAME IN LENGTH, IN LIGHT NOR IN BEAUTY. SOME DAYS ARE LONG AND SUNLIT, OTHERS ARE CLOUDY AND STORMY, AS IN A WINTER'S TALE.

SOME CHILDREN ARE ABLE TO STAY ONLY A FEW SHORT HOURS. SOME MUST GO HOME AT NOON OF DAY WHILE THE SUN IS STILL SHINING. OTHERS STAY TILL THE SUN BEGINS TO SET IN THE BEAUTY OF THE WEST. FOR EACH OF US THE MOMENT COMES WHEN THE GREAT NURSE, DEATH, TAKES US BY THE HAND AND QUIETLY SAYS, "IT IS TIME TO GO HOME, MY CHILD: COME, COME WITH ME." THIS ONE HAS BEEN PRIVILEGED TO LIVE UNTIL THE SHADOWS OF THE SETTING SUN HAD LENGTHENED, AND THE EVENING HAD COME, THE BUSINESS OF THE WORLD WAS HUSHED, AND THE FEVER OF LIFE WAS OVER, AND WORK WAS DONE. OH, THE BEAUTY OF THE SUNSET OF A LIFE LIKE THIS.

L. IT IS A BEAUTIFUL DEATH, BECAUSE IT CLIMAXES A WONDERFUL LIFE.

Esther
ONE NEED NOT EULOGIZE THE CHARACTER OF THE DEPARTED TO YOU WHO HAVE KNOWN HER- HER LIFE TELLS ITS OWN STORY. THE FRIENDSHIP EXPRESSED HERE DEMONSTRATE HER INFLUENCE: HER FAMILY TELLS SOMETHING ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LIFE.

SOME THERE ARE WHO COME TO THE END OF LIFE FILLED WITH REMORSE AND REGRET. "TAKE MY WASTED YEARS," SAID ONE, "AND BURY THEM WITH ME." HE HAD MISUSED HIS LIFE, HAD FURTHERED NO GREAT CAUSE OF HUMAN WELFARE, HAD BURIED HIS TALENTS IN CHEAP, SELFISH SECURITY. TO SUCH THE MASTER SAID, "THOU WICKED AND SLOTHFUL SERVANT," AND INSTRUCTED THAT THEY BE CAST INTO OUTER DARKNESS.

THE SWEETEST WORDS WHICH ONE COULDEVER HEAR, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BENEDICTION THAT COULD CONCLUDE A LIFE, THE MOST COVETED EPITAPH THAT COULD GRACE ONE'S FAREWELL, WOULD BE THOSE WORDS SPOKEN BY THE MASTER WHEN HE SAID, "WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT: THOU HAST BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A FEW THINGS. I WILL MAKE THEE RULER OVER MANY THINGS. ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD."

Esther
THE ONE WE HONOR LIVED A USEFUL, DEVOTED, UNSELFISH LIFE. THE WORLD HAS BEEN MADE BETTER FOR HER HAVING LIVED. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED BY HER EFFORTS. SURELY, THE CONGRATULATORY HAND OF LIFE'S ALL-WISE JUDGE REACHES OUT TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT, "WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT."

11. THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL DEATH ALSO, BECAUSE IT COMES AS A FRIEND OF OLD AGE. *old friend*
I REALLY MEAN THAT. WE OFTEN WISH IN A CHILDISH WAY THAT LIFE WOULD NEVER END, AND IN OUR REBELLIOUS MOMENTS WE WONDER WHY GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE SO DEATH COMES AT ALL. WE FEEL DEATH IS AN ENEMY OF LIFE- AND NOT A FRIEND.

BUT THAT IS NOT RIGHT. IT IS THE KNOWLEDGE THAT OUR YEARS ARE

LIMITED THAT MAKES THEM SO PRECIOUS. PLATO WAS RIGHT WHEN HE DECLARED THAT INFINITE LIFE ON THIS EARTH FOR US HUMAN BEINGS WOULD NOT BE DESIRABLE EVEN IF IT WERE POSSIBLE. WHO WOULD WANT TO LIVE A NEVER-ENDING EXISTENCE ON EARTH THROUGH ENDLESS YEARS OF STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION, PAIN AND WORRY, CONFLICT AND LABOR - WITH NO POSSIBILITY OF ESCAPE? LIFE WOULD BE SO MONOTONOUS AND BORING WITH NO HEIGHTS OR DEPTHS, WITHOUT CRESCENDOS OR DIMINUENDOS, WITH NO CHALLENGE NOR ACHIEVEMENT. WHAT DRUDGERY IF DAY WOULD NEVER END, AND THE SUN WOULD NEVER SET.

HAVE YOU TOILED THROUGH THE HOT, SWEATY, SWELTERING DAY, LOOKING FORWARD TO THE SUNSET? TIME MOVED SO SLOWLY: IT SEEMED THE DAY WOULD NEVER END. THEN, WHEN EVENING FINALLY CAME- HOW WELCOME, WHAT COOL PEACE AND EMBRACING REST: WHAT SATISFYING RELEASE, WHAT A WONDERFUL FRIEND.

Esther
THIS ONE HAS LIVED MANY YEARS, AND DEATH MUST HAVE COME AS A FRIEND INDEED.

111. THEN, THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL DEATH BECAUSE THERE ARE RAYS OF PROMISE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW.

O HAPPY SOUL, BE THANKFUL NOW, AND REST!
HEAVEN IS A GOODLY LAND:
AND GOD IS LOVE: AND THOSE HE LOVES ARE BLEST:
NOW THOU DOST UNDERSTAND
THE LEAST THOU HAST IS BETTER THAN THE BEST
THAT THOU DIDST HOPE FOR: NOW UPON THINE EYES
THE NEW LIFE OPENS FAIR:
BEFORE THY FEET THE BLESSED JOURNEY LIES
THROUGH HOMELANDS EVERYWHERE:
AND HEAVEN TO THEE IS ALL A SWEET SURPRISE.

THE BEST IS YET TO BE. DEATH IS NOT THE END: IT IS ONLY A NEW BEGINNING. IT IS GOING TO BED ON A COLD BLACK NIGHT, AND WAKING WITH THE SUN ALWAYS SHINING.

VICTOR HUGO, THE FRENCH AUTHOR, WROTE, "WHEN I GO DOWN TO THE GRAVE, I CAN SAY, LIKE MANY OTHERS, "I HAVE FINISHED MY DAY'S WORK." BUT I CANNOT SAY, "I HAVE FINISHED MY LIFE." MY DAYS WORK WILL BEGIN THE NEXT MORNING. THE TOMB IS NOT A BLIND ALLEY: IT IS A THOROUGHFARE. IT CLOSSES ON THE TWILIGHT, AND OPENS ON THE DAWN."

REV. ROBERT J. BURDETTE, SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH, WROTE A PERSONAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF AN EASTERN PAPER, SAYING: