

Depending on God

“Living with their heads in the clouds” is no compliment to anyone living in this world of ours. How realistic is Paul’s advice, to live as though the ordinary events and concerns of life did not matter? As if business, planning, bereavements, possessions, and the rest were of no fundamental importance? Well, first of all he does not mean that people should withdraw from all these things or neglect the practical life. What he does mean is that we should get our priorities right, and get a proper balanced view of things, so that what is of lasting importance can play its part too — namely, the question of our eternal destiny, and how we stand in the sight of God.

Under the influence of a brush with death — a near escape, or a recent bereavement — we come to realize how trivial are the usual concerns that engross us, when compared to the abiding mystery of life and death. Does it have a purpose? Is our life going anywhere, or is it simply an absurd farce, poised between comedy and tragedy? There are three common reactions to this mystery of life and death:

First: You cannot take it with you — so spend it while you can. When you are dead, you are dead and that’s it! So, make the most of these short years, enjoy them to the utmost, and then submit to the universal annihilation that awaits us all.

Second: A hope that there may be life beyond the grave, but one which seems so shadowy and insubstantial that there is little point in thinking about it. Still, it’s a worry. Perhaps there will be a punishing judgement for wrongs done in this life, which we managed to get away with

Third: The conviction that God holds each human life securely in his hand, so that death is just a passing-over into his direct presence. In the biblical view, we should not worry about death, nor about anything, in life so much as to turn to God and obey his word. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his glory” says Jesus. If we can make the right primary decision, if our first desire is to fit in with God’s plan for us, then everything else will fall into place; life and work, marriage, successes and failures, sickness and even death itself.

All of us, no matter how long we have been living in the faith, need to reawaken this attitude of trust. We need conversion, no, less than the people of Nineveh, or the people of Galilee. Repent, and believe, says Jesus today, to each one here. Believe that God is my father and your father; believe that he is near at hand, and that he is merciful; realize that God’s will for you is that you be saved — and that includes the need to live by his Gospel. “Repent” — yes, the challenge is as fresh today as when our Lord first spoke it. As though we were hearing of the kingdom of God for the first time and making our first act of total trust and total submission to God’s love.

Taking Jesus at his word, being converted to genuine faith in God the Father, does not mean living with our head in the clouds. Genuine Christian devotion certainly fixes our ambition away above the passing things of life, but also keeps us aware of everyday duties towards other people. Hearing the Gospel, welcoming and following it, keeps a person with feet well grounded in reality, more keenly involved than ever in carrying out the tasks that have to be done here and now, because now is the day of salvation; now is the time, given us by God to pay him our thanksgiving through service.