

On Death XVI

What can we expect on the final journey, that path is decided today as we live.

Nearly all deaths from a clinical standpoint are the result of a cascade of bodily organ systems shutting down. As shutdown progresses over a very short time, death arrives. Those who have been resuscitated medically speak of a tunnel or passage through which they seem to be passing, following often a light or a person of light; there follows according to most of the stories a moment of decision or judgment when they either go on, or return to their life, or as they usually say to their bodies. Many Catholics have found comfort in these anecdotal stories and see the person who greets them as Jesus himself, and the judgment as not something fearful, but illuminating. The letter to the Hebrews does say “first death and then the judgment.” In classic Catholic thought the soul is judged and either the person goes toward God or away from God. Away would be Hell, or complete separation. Toward God might mean in classical terms purgatory – a place of purgation that is purification and preparation to enter directly into God’s presence, which of course is Heaven. A few Saints will be sufficiently ready to be with God directly in what is called the “Beatific vision” where we will see God “face to face.” Dante’s Divine Comedy paints an elaborate description of these final states: oddly for Dante Hell is not a place of fire, but a place of ice, where souls so ensconced are frozen into themselves. Though Dante described Purgatory as fire, is a hopeful state wherein we are prepared beyond what we were able to do in this present life. Traditionally the time in purgatory has been measured in years, but we have no idea exactly how long a person would be consigned there; in eternity there is no time, no past no present no future, there is only now, and eternally we are with God or we turn away.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry