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God Created Man for Life, Not Death

Gospel Commentary for the Feast of All Souls' Day

By Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap

ROME, NOV. 2, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is the occasion for an existential reflection on death.

In Scripture we read this solemn declaration: "For God made not death, neither does he take pleasure in the destruction of the living ... for he created man for immortality. God made him an image of his own nature. But death entered the world because of the devil's envy" (Wisdom 1:13-15, 24).

From this we understand why we are so much repulsed by death. It is because death is not "natural" for us. As we experience it in the present order of things it is something extraneous to our nature, fruit of "the devil's envy." Because of this we fight against it with all our might. Our indomitable rejection of death is the best proof that we are not made for it, and that it does not have the last word. The first reading of the Mass reassures us of this: "The souls of the just are in the hands of God, no torment can touch them."

Fear of death is written deeply into every human being. There have been those who have wanted to trace every human activity back to the sexual instinct and explain everything by it, even art and religion. But the fear of death is stronger still than the sexual instinct, and the latter is but a manifestation of the former. All of humanity cries out: "I do not want to die!"

Why, then, should we ask men to think about death if it is already so present to us? The answer is simple: We have chosen not to think about it. We pretend that it does not exist, or that it exists only for others, but not for ourselves.

But the thought of death does not allow itself to be put aside so easily. So, all we can do is repress it or play down its seriousness. Men have never ceased to look for remedies to death. One of these is called offspring: surviving through one's children. Another is fame. In our day a new pseudo-remedy is spreading: the doctrine of reincarnation.

The doctrine of reincarnation is incompatible with the Christian faith, which professes the resurrection of the dead in its place. "It is established that men die only once and after this there is judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). The manner in which reincarnation is taught to us in the West is the fruit of, among other things, a glaring error. Originally, reincarnation did not add to life, but rather added to suffering; it was not cause for consolation, but for fear. Reincarnation was a warning to humanity: "Be careful not to do evil because you will be reborn to expiate it!" It is like telling someone in prison who is about to finish serving his time, that his punishment has been extended and he must start all over.

Christianity has something quite different to offer in regard to the problem of death. It proclaims that "one has died for all," that death has been defeated; it is no longer a precipice over which all must plunge, but rather a

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bridge to the other shore -- eternity. Nevertheless, reflecting on death is also good for believers. It helps us, above all, to live better.

Are you troubled by problems, difficulties, conflicts? Think about how these things will appear at the moment of death and see how they take on a different meaning. We will not then be resigned and paralyzed. On the contrary, we will do more things and do them better because we are more calm, more detached. Counting our days, the Psalm says, we "arrive at the wisdom of the heart" (Psalm 89:12).

[Translation by ZENIT]

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Father Raniero Cantalamessa is the Pontifical Household preacher. The readings for the feast of All Souls' Day are Wisdom 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-5, 6-7; Matthew 5:1-12.

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