

The blessed Apostle admonishes us not to be sorrowful concerning "those who sleep in death ... like those who have no hope," that is, the hope of the resurrection and of eternal life. For the Scripture is accustomed to adopt this most correct term in their regard, that when we hear them spoken of as those who sleep, we may have the greater confidence in their awakening. Hence, too, the psalm says, "Shall he that sleeps rise no more?"

A certain sadness over the dead, whom we love, is in a manner natural, for it is not our judgment, but our nature, which shuns death. Nor would death have befallen man had it not followed his sin as a penalty. Thus, if animals who are created for a certain period of time, try to escape death and love their life, how much more does man, who was so created, that, if he had chosen to live without sin, he would have lived forever?

Hence of necessity we must be sad when our dear ones leave us by death; for although we know that they do not leave us on earth forever, but are only preceding us who are shortly to follow, still death itself, which our nature shrinks from, when it strikes someone we love, grieves the affection which is in us. Therefore the Apostle did not exhort us not to be sorrowful, but only not to be like "others who have no hope." We grieve, then, over the necessity of losing our friends in death, but with the hope of again seeing them. This necessity causes us anguish, but the hope consoles us; our infirmity is tried by the one, and our faith is strengthened by the other: on the one hand our human condition sorrows, on the other the divine promise is our salvation.

In like manner, funeral pomp and show, a costly tomb, and the erection of rich monuments, solace the living if you will; they profit not the dead. But there is no sort of doubt that the dead are helped by the prayers of Holy Church and the sacrifice of salvation, and by alms, that God may deal more mercifully with them than their sins have deserved.

For the universal Church carries on the tradition which has been handed down by our fathers, that of praying for those who have departed hence in the communion of the body and blood of Christ, by commemorating them at a particular place in the sacrifice itself, and by remembering to offer it also for them. Who indeed may doubt that works of mercy, which are offered up in their memory, relieve them for whose sakes prayer is not vainly made to God? ...

A proper care should be shown for the tomb and for burial, for such care is reckoned in holy Scripture among good works. Nor is the praise bestowed upon it confined to those who buried the bodies of patriarchs and other holy people, or corpses in general, but it is extended to those who performed the same office for the body of our Lord himself. Then let men carry out these last offices for their dead and solace their human grief in so doing.

But let them, who have a spiritual as well as a natural affection for their friends who are dead according to the flesh, though not according to the spirit, show a far greater solicitude and care and zeal in offering up for them those things which help the spirits of the departed -- alms, and prayers, and supplication.