

DEATH IN TWENTY SECONDS



Australians were shocked to view, on their national day 26th January 2017, the sudden death of a pilot and his passenger when their aeroplane crashed into the Swan River in Perth, Western Australia. In an old, but airworthy, Grumman Mallard seaplane, the pilot was conducting a relatively slow and low level pass down the river, part of an airshow, when it seemed he allowed the plane to bank beyond a safe angle and it fell out of the sky. The two on board, each doubtless carefree and anticipating a long life ahead, found themselves, in less time than it takes to tell, facing the judgment seat of God.

The tragedy provided a salutary lesson not only for the 300,000 odd people who had gathered around the river's shores to celebrate Australia Day but for all who viewed the various videos of the incident throughout the world. How many would take the lesson to heart ?

We do not bring ourselves into existence ; neither do we keep ourselves in existence. We are both—

- [contingent - we can be and be-not
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- [dependent - kept in existence by some influence other than ourselves.

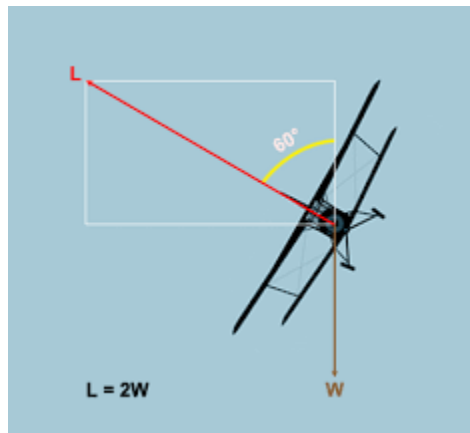
What is it about this life that we have been given so generously that it can end so suddenly ? Is human existence no more than this, a few years of joys and sorrows and then oblivion ? In the argot of the age “we will be a long time dead”, but what happens to us after death ? Every man's soul yearns for happiness. We cannot help ourselves ; the desire for happiness is imprinted on our being— and not just a limited happiness, but *eternal* happiness, everlasting happiness. The poetry, the songs, men write are insistent on the point. Which invites the reasonable conclusion that the one who

brought us into existence—and who keeps us in existence—is himself an intellectual being of power so immense that he is able to satisfy this yearning and to give us the eternal happiness we desire. The English Catholic bishop, Henry Edward Cardinal Manning summarised the issues for humanity in this way—

“[I]t is a violation of reason not to believe in God... [I]t is a violation of our moral sense not to believe that God has made Himself known to man... that the revelation He has given is Christianity ; and... that Christianity is Catholicism.”

St Paul in his first epistle to the *Thessalonians* chapter 5 repeats what Our Lord Jesus Christ told us while on earth—“Stay awake for you know neither the day nor the hour”. To ensure we attain the happiness that will endure for all eternity, we must live constantly in the state of grace.

Consider how sensitive a pilot must be to the natural law of aerodynamics if he is to keep his aeroplane flying. Here is an illustration we have used before. It shows a light plane flying at its maximum angle of bank, 60°. If the pilot exceeds this angle the plane will fall out of the sky. Now, living in the state of grace is a very much like flying an aeroplane.



To remain in that state we must be as conscious of the natural moral law as the pilot is of the law of aerodynamics.

Grace is a life, grafted on our human life. We live at three natural levels, in reverse order—

3. rational level - whose powers are intellect & will ;
2. animal level - whose powers and the senses (internal & external), and the appetites that follow on those powers, the passions (irascible & concupiscible) ;
1. vegetative level - whose powers are nutrition and growth.

The life of grace that is added to these is not a substantial thing but accidental. But don't think that it is, therefore, something trivial or of little account. Consider gravity and light. Both of them are accidents yet they exercise immense influence on our lives. So does the life of grace.

What is the nature of this life ? Our Lord took the Jews to task at one point in his ministry quoting the line in *Psalms* 81 which runs “I have said you are gods...” as he addressed their refusal to acknowledge his claim to be the Son of God. (*John* 10 : 34) How can men be gods, or aspire to be gods? Christ is God by nature and the Divine plan enables those who live by the faith that God gives

and in accordance with Christ's teaching and the aid of His sacraments to become sons of God by adoption, sharing in His Divine nature. Grace is a created participation of the life of God. St Paul attests to this when he says, "I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." (*Galatians 2: 20*)

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What is the Mass ? Why do we Catholics attend its celebration so assiduously, daily if we are able ? It is the re-presentation in an un-bloody manner of the sacrifice Christ made on Calvary for all mankind, repeated that Christ may, through the instrumentality of his priests and people, make reparation continually to His Father for the sins of men until the end of time and to intercede for those who have died and await their deliverance from the temporal effects of their sins in Purgatory. And we who participate in Christ's sacrifice each day receive nourishment that the life of grace may grow in us and flourish when we receive the Body of Christ in Holy Communion. Those who live in the state of grace have now, as their present possession, eternal life for Our Lord said : "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life". Note, not "will have", but *has* eternal life.

Without the Mass the world would fall into perdition, for God's anger against men for their sins could not otherwise be assuaged.
