

Some reflections on death

Robert Dessaix (Australian writer, from 'Night Letters')

To talk about dying and being dead makes us intolerably anxious, I think, not just about our own eventual fate, but about the meaning of our own present lives. Yet we're living them, briefly, and to spend too much time contemplating and preparing ourselves for the aeons when we won't be seems futile.

No one minds talking about dying or being dead as a statistic, or quoting a poet of two or even Woody Allen. But no one much feels comfortable talking about dying or being dead when it's about themselves or someone close to them. I don't think there's any taboo on the subject – I just don't think people quite know what to say.

All the same, sometimes I do bring the subject up myself. After all, unless you consider it, how can you know how best to live now? Without thinking through what death means to you, aren't you walking backward towards a precipice? Much better, surely, to walk facing what's ahead, stepping forwards with care, judging your footing and pace.

The First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 15

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.

Billy Graham (American evangelist of world renown; 130,000 gathered at the MCG to hear him in 1959)

I see death as a 'change of address'.

I'm not looking forward to dying: I am looking forward to what it will be like when I am held by Christ in Resurrection.

And I might finally know why there is such pain and suffering in life here, and why evil has such an influence here.

This 'change of address' will mean having to leave behind some very familiar parts of life that have shaped me, and being sad about that. And also really looking forward to the new place and coming to be 'at home' there.

Banjo Patterson (who wrote the words to Waltzing Matilda):

Child, you are wise in your simple trust

For the wise one knows no more than you.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust

Our dreams by a range are bounded too.

But we know that God has this gift in store,

That when we come to that final change

We will meet with our loved ones gone before

In that beautiful country 'Over the Range'