

The Sure and Certain Hope of the Resurrection

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

This being the Sunday closest to November 11th when Canadians remember and honor those who gave their lives in armed conflict, I thought I would share some photos with you. On our tour of Italy and Greece, one of the places we stopped was the Commonwealth war cemetery at Monte Casino, site of one of the many fierce battles in the liberation of Italy where many Canadians died. In their retreat northward through Italy, the German forces left behind strategic forces who had to be overcome in the allied push northward from Sicily where Canadian and other Commonwealth forces landed. The Abbey of Monte Casino was bombed, but since has been rebuilt, and in the valley below is this neatly kept cemetery.



Monte Cassino's most illustrious past residents was Thomas Aquinas, the brilliant young man who went on to study with the Dominicans and later to write his massive scholarly work, entitled *Summa Theologica* which was intended to be a theological treatment of every known discipline under the sun including reconciling Aristotelean philosophy with Christianity.

But on December 6, 1273, Thomas abruptly stopped his work. While celebrating Mass in the chapel of St. Thomas, he caught a glimpse of eternity and suddenly he knew that all his efforts to describe God fell so far short that he decided never to write again. When his secretary, Reginald,

tried to encourage him to do more writing, he said, "Reginald, I can do no more. Such things have been revealed to me that all I have written seems as so much straw." Firm in his resolve, he wrote not another word and he died a year later. Even though Thomas believed his work was straw, death did not have the last word.

A friend reminded me of words spoken by his grandmother, whom I knew, at the time of her death. Apparently, she had her family gathered around her and was not conscious, but then, as often happens, briefly awoke. She named each of the family in turn who were present, showing she had enough awareness of recognize them and remember names. The she smiled at them all and said, "It's so beautiful! It's so beautiful", then slipped peacefully from this earth.

What a comfort that has been, not just to her close family but those who have heard about it.

Paul is writing to comfort his little congregation in Thessalonika.

He says to them, "Do not grieve as those who have no hope."

It seems that the church had become quite fixated on one of Paul's teachings--the return of our Lord, sometimes called The Parousia.

They expected it imminently. They were so focused on the belief that Jesus return would be at any moment that some of them had even quit their jobs and were sitting around waiting for the return of Jesus. Presumably singing hymns and praying.

I suppose its better than sitting around playing bridge, but no more productive, and these folks were not necessarily well enough financially to quit their jobs.

Paul wrote to encourage them, in the belief that Jesus would indeed return, but that they needed to keep productive until then, as no one knew the day or hour of Jesus return.

In addition, their loved ones were dying without seeing the return of Jesus, and this threw them into a tailspin. What was happening? Were their loved ones going to lose out on Jesus return? Would they be left behind and miss out on the life to come?

Paul says, that in no way would the dead in Christ miss out.

Jesus return and the new age to come would be for everyone, for those alive here when he came

and for those who had died in Christ. Those alive would be bodily caught up and would have their mortal bodies instantly transformed, but those who had died before would be given their new resurrection bodies at the same time and would also participate in Jesus return.

What a gift that is to anyone who is grieving a lost loved one.

And we here have all stood by the bed of a loved one who is dying, or we have sat through a funeral and likely have all stood at a gravesite where the lifeless body of a friend or loved one is consigned, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to come.

What a sorrow it would be if we had no hope
But the certainty of hope in Jesus give us eternal hope.

Grieve, not as those who have no hope, but grieve as those who have hope.

Jesus has overcome death and its sting--sin which separates us from God.

In life we are united again with our loving heavenly father for eternity, and not even death can take that away.

In our day, it's more likely than ever that some folks who live around us will raise eyebrows to think that we look for something on the other side of death.

During his 1960 presidential campaign, John F. Kennedy often closed his speeches with the story of Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1789. One day, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously, and some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand. Quelling a clamor for immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought."

The Lord will either return during our lifetime, or He will not.

In the meantime, let us also be found doing our duty, but let us be the candles and offer the light of hope to anyone in grief or despair. You have great good news. Share it as widely as you can.

