

LOVING AND LETTING GO

The Mystery of Death

by Father Robert Pelton

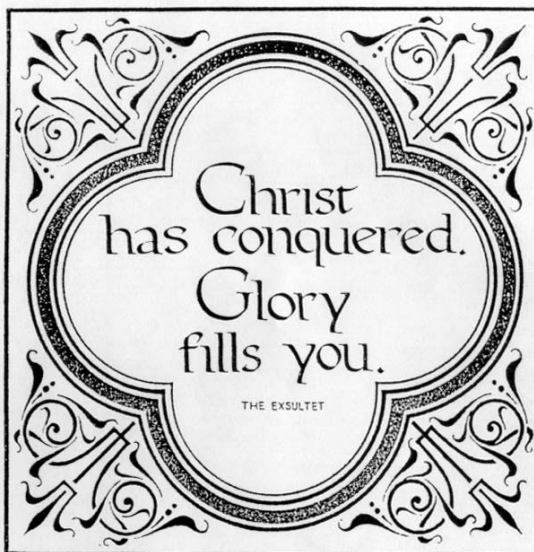
We are strangers before You, and sojourners, as were all our fathers. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding” (1 Chr 29:15). So David the king prayed as he let his life go back to God.

You feel it most sharply in the fall, when leaves let go, when light and warmth fade. All flesh is grass, the sun itself is burning up, and life never stops telling us to let go. But even if we were not outwardly wasting away, even if the sun stood still for an endless succession of moments, so that summer never ended and life never dwindled, it would still be true that only what is unseen lasts forever. All of us, like St. Augustine, yearn for the Beauty, timeless and always new, that is our only lasting home.

How do we get there? The Master told us clearly. He is the one Way to the eternal beauty that is the Father. He empowers us to move to the Father by so uniting himself with us in the Spirit that, if we want, we can live his life, see with his eyes, love with his heart. And what does this mean? He tells us, “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

The more we try to love another — to share this person’s life, to embrace that person’s flesh in marriage, to experience this one in another way, in friendship and humble service — the more we love, the more certainly we must let it all be carried away on the cross and brought back

from the tomb by Christ himself, whose power and goodness we can scarcely find words for.



Susanne Stubbs

The essence of the human person — never mind God! — is so mysterious that to open ourselves to that inner core of another’s being seems to leave behind everything we love most in her or him. All that we love most — bright hair, face in repose, pitch of the voice in speaking our name, eyes where childhood still lives, features shining with unique light, body shaped just this way and no other — is passing away. We cannot hold that beauty unless we let it go; yet what love is this that asks love’s end?

Christ our Master spoke of that place on the other side of death and made himself the way to it by our own passage into and back from darkness:

“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later....Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house....I am going there to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am”

(Jn 13:36, 14:1-3).

One cold day I was struggling once again with the mystery of love and the pain of love. I was living the anguish of knowing that the flesh and all its beauty is passing

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away into separation, illness, old age, forgetfulness, and death.

Then suddenly, like the gentle opening of one's eyes after a long sleep, I "saw." The Lord within me touched my inner eyes and I saw that all the beauty in those I had loved was simply the outer brightness of a deeper reality. Not what we normally think of as the "soul" — something misty and insubstantial — but the spiritual substance that is the true core of the human person.

I realized that all my life I had clutched at people because I couldn't bear to let go of the beauty of the seen — this moment, this flesh, that look or way of being. I realized that my "love" had often caused death because I would not let go. And suddenly I knew that if I did let go, not just once, but over and over and over again, I would always be traveling into the very center of the other, whomever I wanted to love, not leaving the body behind, but finding the source of its beauty in the unseen depth of the mystery we call person.

I saw that Jesus my Master was asking me to let go of regret and desire so that I could follow him to that deeper place. As I let go and let my eyes, my heart, my being pass beyond all I could see and touch and hold, the sorrow of all my goodbyes would vanish too; and in the place I had always thought of as emptiness I would never

have to say goodbye again.

As the unseen Lord made his real presence known to my true eyes, as he taught me to stand still and alone in my own inmost being, where I already abide in him, he would reveal to me the beauty in each person that is beyond withering and fading. I saw that my risen Master was offering, now, his Kingdom: a communion in his Father's love where I would always be at home with all those I loved.

"The world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you....He who loves me will be loved by my Father....My Father and I will come to him and make our home with him." (Jn 14:19-21, 23)

God is at home with us. The Father holds all our falling, and we fall always into his light — the light that this present world can neither see nor overcome. All is well: we begin to love with the love that cannot pass away.

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