Life and Death of the Soul
From letter to Nun Xenia
Life and Death of the Soul

• What is meant by death?
• John the Theologian says: “There is sin that leads to death... There is sin that does not lead to death.” (1 John 5:16-17)

What death is he referring to?
• Paul says, “Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead and Christ will give you light.” (Eph 5:14)

What death was Paul referring to?
• Peter says it is the death caused by “sinful desires (fleshly lusts) that wage war against the soul”? (1 Peter 2:11)

• Gregory reminds us, “there is a death of the soul, though by nature the soul is immortal.”
What is Death?

- The Lord has also called those who live in this vain world as “dead.”
- Remember when Jesus was preparing to leave for the other side of the lake and one of His disciples asked permission to go and bury his father? (Matthew 8:18-22)
- What did He do?
- He refused to grant permission and told him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matt 8:22). Why did he call them dead?
- Not because they were physically dead but because they were dead in their soul, spiritually dead.
What is Death?

* What is death?
  * Two kinds: death of body and death of soul.
    * **Death of body:**
      separation of the soul from the body and the physical organism begins to decay.
    * **Death of soul:**
      separation of God from the soul - true death
What is Death?

* Can see this from story of Fall of Adam and Eve.
* In paradise what was commandment God gave to Adam?
  * “On whatever day you eat from the forbidden tree you will certainly die.” (Gen 2:17)
* Did Adam die bodily when he ate forbidden fruit?
  * No. Lived for 937 years after.
    Separated from God, **His soul died**.
* In paradise the death of the soul came first and the death of the body followed.
What is Death?

Adam’s transgression, Gregory tells us, “not only crippled the soul... it also rendered the body itself subject to fatigue, suffering and corruptibility, and finally handed it over to physical death.”

After suffering this inner death what did Adam hear?

“Earth will be cursed because of what you do, it will produce thorns and thistles for you; through the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread until you return to the earth from which you were taken: for you are earth, and to earth you will return” (Gen 3:17-19).

First comes death of the soul and then we return to the earth.
Second Coming

At the time of Second Coming and Resurrection, bodies of those whose souls are dead will be given over to the second death.

What is this second death?

Age-long chastisement, the “unsleeping worm” (Mark 9:44), the “gnashing of teeth”, the “outer tangible darkness” (Matt 8:12), the “murky and unquenchable fire of Gehenna” (Matt 5:22) in which, as the prophet says, the godless sinners “will be burned up together and there will be none to quench the flame” (Isa 1:31).

St John teaches us about this second death in Revelation (Rev 20:14) Where those separated from God were “cast into the lake of fire.”
What is Death?

✶ What does this mean to us?
✶ What questions does it raise?
Paul speaking of life and death in the age to come says, “If you believe in accordance with your fallen self, you will die, but if through the Spirit you extirpate [root out and destroy] the evil actions of your fallen self, you will live” (Rom 8:13).

He is saying, With repentance we can avoid “death” and have true life = enjoyment of everlasting kingdom

Without God, without Spirit as our guide, if you trust in worldly things, it’s death = age-long chastisement.
True Life

* Gregory says,
  “Death, properly speaking is this: The soul’s withdrawal from divine grace and its attachment to sin.

* This death, for those who have intelligence, is truly dreadful and something to flee... more dreadful that torment in Gehenna.” With fear we will do anything to avoid.

* Why is it so dreadful?

* Life of the soul is true life, a union with God

* Just as transgression of the commandment separated Adam from God; likewise its reunification by obedience to the commandments grants it life.
“He who is frightened of this death [of the soul] and has preserved himself from it will not be alarmed by the oncoming death of the body...”

When we say have the fear of God what is implied?

* Fear of death of our soul, separating us from God.
* A fear of **loss of our relationship with God.**

Why will this kind of fear allow us to not fear physical death?
Primary Challenge

* So what is our primary challenge?
* To **avoid “death” of our soul** and gain eternal life in Paradise.
Obedience

What causes this death of our soul or separation?

- **Violation of God’s commandments.**
- **Not loving God** so that we desire above all else to follow Him and live by His commandments.
- Not living a life where all our actions are taken to glorify God.

What brings life?

- **Obedience** to His commandments.
  Acting always to Glorify Him.
Gregory: “The life of the soul is union with God.”

This is why the Lord says, “The words I speak to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:63)

Saint Peter said to Him, “Thy words are the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

These are words of eternal life only for those who obey them. For those who disobey them there is death.

Paul reflects: “The commandment which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.” (Rom 7:10-11)
Union

» Just as the life of the body is the union with the soul, the life of the soul is its union with God.
Resurrection

★ Does Eternal life for those who obey also include the body?
★ Yes. Through resurrection it too is rendered immortal. It is given “eternal life in Christ, free of pain, sickness and sorrow, and truly immortal.” (2 Cor 2:16)
★ How about those whose soul is dead?
★ The death of the soul is followed by the death of the body - **forever**.
   It dissolves into the earth back to dust and the **soul is banished to Hades**.
★ The resurrection of the **living soul**, is followed by the body’s resurrection and its reunion with the soul.
Eternal Life

* Gregory says:
  “And for those who experience it, the consequence of this resurrection will be **true incorruption and eternal life** with God: they will become **spiritual** instead of non-spiritual, and will dwell in heaven as **angels** [detached from earthly things] **of God**” (Matt 22:30)

* St. Paul says:
  “**We shall be caught up in the clouds** [not physical] **to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall be with the Lord forever**” (1 Thess 4:17).

* There is **great hope** for those who nurture life of their soul through **obedience to God’s commandments**.
He warns, “If you do not **strive** here, to gain this life in your soul, **do not deceive yourself with vain hopes** about receiving it hereafter, or about God then being compassionate towards you.”

What is he saying here?

After physical death is the time for requital and retribution and not compassion and sympathy.
Paul speaking of those who willfully disobey God’s will, warns, *Woe to him who falls into the hands of the living God.* (Heb 10:31)

...a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation (Heb 10:27)

Our loving and forgiving God is also unmerciful at the time of Judgment for those whose soul is dead, for those who knowingly disobey His commandments.
Fear of God

★ Gregory also warns,
“Woe to him who hereafter experiences the Lord’s wrath, who has not acquired in this life the fear of God and so comes to know the might of His anger, who has not through his actions gained a foretaste of God’s compassion!”

★ If our soul is alive, we love God and can know his unlimited mercy, but we also have fear of our separation from him.

★ What good does the fear bring us?
★ It’s foundation of life of repentance, our compunction and tears for our sinfulness as we beg for His forgiveness and commit to change our way of life.
Repentance

✶ When is the time for repentance?
✶ Why is the fact that a sinner still lives is good news?
  ✶ It’s a pledge that God will accept whoever desires to return and follow Him.
  ✶ God is all merciful while in the world
✶ We are gifted with free will, created in His image. What is the implication of this?
✶ We can choose to reject the road of death or accept the path of life.
✶ Do you see the meaning of this?
Choose the Right Road

- God has **infinite patience** and does not immediately condemn us. **He allows time** for our conversion and correction.
- But what do we have to do?
  - have to **choose** the right road.
- He freely gives us the **necessary power** to be united with Him and to **become one spirit with Him** (1 Cor 6:17).
- We must cooperate and accept this power with humility.
Parable of the Vineyard

* If we do not choose right path God **does not** take away this power from us. He constantly gives opportunity to change our path.
* We see this told to us in the parable of the vineyard. Remember the story? (Matthew 20:1-16)
“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went.

Again...about the sixth and ninth hour, ... eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle... He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’
“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’

And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.

But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius.

And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner...

But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong... Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you....
Parable of the Vineyard

＊ Who is calling them to work and provides a wage?
＊ The Father

＊ What is the vineyard where they are called to work?
＊ Christ himself who said, “I am the vine” (John 15:1) and no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. (John 6:44)

＊ What are the branches they will prune?
＊ Christ says, “You are the branches, My Father is the vine-dresser”. (John 15:1)

＊ The Father, not counting our trespasses invites us not for being absorbed in improper works, but because we are idle.
Parable of the Vineyard

- Foreseeing our sins he calls us over and over again.
- To do what?
- To cultivate the vineyard.
- What does this mean?
- We must take care of branches, that is our own selves.
Parable of the Vineyard

* Afterwards there is the same wage no matter what hour we began this work.
* Don’t despair if you think you have lived a sinful life. With repentance the slate is cleaned.
* Gregory writes, “O the grandeur of His compassion – He promises and gives us a **reward for toiling on our own behalf**: ‘Come’, He says, ‘receive eternal life, which I bestow abundantly...”
Parable of the Vineyard

☆ What does abundantly mean?
☆ Not only that He is with us and yoked together with us, but He also makes us His brothers and sisters and co-heirs.
☆ It’s the wage given to those who rush to the life giving Vine.
☆ We are his branches who watch over ourselves in toil over ourselves.
Parable of the Vineyard

What does this kind do?

They trim everything which is superfluous and not useful and that which prevent the ripening of the fruits worthy of a divine harvest.

And what are these?

The Passions

Gregory says, “Wealth, luxury, vainglory, everything that is destructive and transient, every disgusting and evil passion of the soul and body, ill imaginary rabble of the mind, every rumor and spectacle, and every word able to bring harm to the soul.”
Parable of the Vineyard

Why?

- He says, “If one does not cut off and thoroughly cleanse, through great attention and struggle, that which sprouts in the heart, in no way will one “gather fruit for eternal life.”” (John 4:36)

- This is the whole purpose of the Incarnation. ‘I have come so that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness.’ (John 10:10)
What is this path like for a living soul?

A difficult one.
Entrance into Kingdom is a narrow one. Scripture says we must enter through a straight and narrow gate. (Matt 7:13-14)

Gregory says,
“You cannot pass through this narrow gate while carrying a load of self-glory, or a cornucopia of self-indulgence, or the burden of money and possessions.”
What is the other path called?

“broad” and “wide.”

Why is it broad?

Because there are many who pass along it (Matt 7:13) “each bearing a heavy load of the rubbish of the fleeting material life.”

Although the narrow path is more difficult “it brings solace, confers the kingdom of heaven and fosters salvation.”
The Path

 Leads us to the question: How do I enliven my soul, walk the narrow path, to gain what He has promised? Where do I begin so I do not end up among the ‘dead’?

A life of repentance
We Must change.

First step means we must control our desires (passions), finding peace in our mind, leading us to noetic prayer and union with God, so we can live in virtues according to His commandments.
His sermons on the Ascension also give a impassioned plea for repentance.

“All our life is a season of repentance, for God “desires not the death of the sinner, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11 LXX)

Need Humility and Obedience of Christ. Apostle says about Christ, “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:8-11).
Gregory asks: If God highly exalted His Christ because He humbled Himself, suffered dishonor, was tempted and endured a shameful Cross and death for our sake, how will He save, glorify and raise us up if we neither choose humility, nor show love to our fellows, nor gain our souls by enduring temptation, nor follow the saving Guide through the “straight gate” and along the “narrow way” leading to eternal life?

Peter says, “Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.” (1Peter 2:21)
The Path

☆ What do we have to do with our free will?
  ☆ Either:
    Attach ourselves to God’s will for continuous progress, improvement,
  ☆ Or:
    Oppose God’s will and be subjected to what He permits, failing to improve but sinking from bad to worse.

☆ Christ says, “Strive to enter at the straight gate” (Luke 13:24) “straight and narrow is the way the leads to life, for wide and broad is the way which leads to destruction.” (Matt 7:14-14)

☆ Elsewhere He says, “woe into you that are rich! Woe unto you that are full! Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you” (Luke 6:24-26).
Again He says, *Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth*” (Matt 6:19)

And, “*Take heed to yourselves, lest at anytime your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life.*” (Luke 21:34)

And, *How can you believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only?* (John 5:44)
The Path

• Christ shows us how blessed that way is that leads to life.

• He tells us, **Blessed are the poor... Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake.**
  
  (Matt 5:3-10).

• “**Sell what you have and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven.**”  (Matt 19:21)

• “**Everyone who has left house or lands, or any other earthly goods for my sake and the gospels, shall receive an hundredfold and inherit eternal life.**”  (Mark 10:29-30)
The Path

Christ attacked anger declaring it to be equal with murder and subject to the same condemnation. He said anyone moved by anger to insult someone was in danger of hell-fire. (Matt 5:22)

On the other hand He pronounced meekness blessed and honored it with the greatest rewards. (Matt 5:5)

He condemned licentiousness severely calling a passionate, inquisitive glance at another man’s wife adultery (Matt 5:28)

He emphasized that anyone who acted with purity, a pure heart, would be blessed and see God. (Matt 5:28)
The Path

✱ We must **Overcome evil with good**.

✱ Scripture is so clear.

   “**Recompense no man evil for evil**” (Rom 12:17)

✱ **Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you.”** (Matt 5:44)
Reward

- What are the rewards for these struggles?
- That you may be children of your Father which is in heaven (Matt 5:45)
  Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17)
- That you may have immortal life and receive and ineffable, unshakeable, unending kingdom, living and reigning with God for endless ages.
Reward

Can you see the reward, the joy and glory there is for those who follow it?

It is clear why we are asked to follow a straight and narrow way?

Can you see how this path will overcome all the common maladies of our modern life, all our anguish and troubles if we commit to this path with the hope of the rewards?

Can you see it is not easy but well worth the effort?
Think about it, Gregory says:

If someone promised to give you long life if you only obeyed him, would you not eagerly submit to him provided he did not demand anything impossible?

If he further promised health, glory and pleasure for as long as you lived, is there anything you would not undertake for Him?

And if he offered a kingdom that was free from wars and untroubled as well as a long, healthy life,

would you not be thrilled, and think easy, everything that led to that end, sustaining yourself with expectations and enjoying the object of your hope as if it were already present, as long as you considered he was telling you the truth?
Reward

* Gregory says, “So let anyone who desires these things run toward heaven and whether the way there be easy of difficult, let him journey along it, “rejoicing in hope” and “patient tribulation.”” (Rom 12:12)
Reward

* Shall we not serve the Lord who by nature loves mankind, risk our lives and get rid of superfluous possessions in order to acquire heavenly riches?

* Shall we not endure dishonor from men, usually scoundrels, so as to attain to divine glory, exchanging the mortal for the immortal?

* Shall we not be hungry in moderation and thirsty that we may eat the bread of life which came down from heaven (John 6:51), and drink the true living water, whosoever is worthy to eat and drink of which shall never thirst (John 4:10, 14)?
Should we not cleanse the eye of our soul abstaining “from all defilement of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor 7:1), in order that we become children of that light (Eph 5:8), and other lights ourselves, through sharing in His light, holding forth the word of life? (Phil 2:15-16)
REWRS

Let us live as He did and as He showed and taught us when He was made man.

Let us take up our cross and follow Him (Matt 16:24),

having crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24),

that we may be glorified together with Him (Rom 8:17), and rise with Him,

and after our resurrection be taken up to Him as He was at the Ascension to the Father.
We start the imitation of Christ with Holy baptism. Virtuous living and conduct in accord with the gospels are in intermediate stage, and its perfection is victory is gained through spiritual struggles against the passions...

As Paul says, “If you live in the flesh you shall die, but if you live through the Spirit and mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live” (Rom 8:13)

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and you yourself like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return” (Luke 12:35-36)

“Be ready: for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man cometh” (Matt 23:44)
Save Your Soul!

-Life with a dead soul is meaningless. We strive, we achieve, we suffer this and that and feel something missing.

-For a fulfilled life our soul must be alive and active.

-Reflect on this.

-What is necessary for you to save your soul and make sure its alive and not dead, to gain a fulfilled life?

-Next time: Purification of the Soul