

## New Testament Epistles

### **1 Corinthians 15:51-57 *Death is swallowed up in victory.***

Paul mocks death, for Christ's victory has rendered it powerless. This sentiment can resonate with mourners who are already at peace with their loved one's death. However, it can be a challenge for others, who are still hurting. In those cases, the homilist can point out that death still retains some of its sting, in the form of grief for our deceased loved ones. Even though we are confident of their eternal joy, we still feel a sense of loss and emptiness because they are no longer with us physically.

### **2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1 *What is seen is transitory; what is unseen is eternal.***

Paul offers a perfect image to capture the transitory nature of our earthly life in contrast to the eternal life of heaven: a tent versus a permanent home. This comparison between the temporary and the permanent puts life and death into the proper perspective. Our mortal life is short, even if it lasts many decades. The "wasting away" of our bodies, especially in the case of a slow, degenerative disease, can feel interminable. However, it is nothing in comparison to the eternity to come. And, our inner self can be renewed by God's grace, even as we suffer bodily.

### **2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10 *We have an everlasting home in heaven.***

This reading begins with the images of the tent and permanent home that ended the previous passage. Here Paul goes on to describe a longing to be with the Lord in that eternal home. This can be especially appropriate for someone who had actually expressed that longing prior to death.

The passage ends with a promise of just judgment for the deceased. This idea can be comforting in the case of a person who lived a good and holy life, but distressing in the case of someone whose life was not so exemplary. Hence, this reading may not be the best choice for all circumstances.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *The dead in Christ will rise; we shall always be with the Lord.***

Paul was trying to assuage the Thessalonians' fear that their loved ones who had died before Jesus' return might miss their opportunity to share in the final victory of Christ. Paul assures them that the dead are already secure. So, although it is good for us to grieve for them, we should do so with hope in the resurrection. Our faith tempers our sorrow by removing all fear of our loved ones being lost forever.

Paul also emphasizes that all of us will be reunited with lost loved ones after death. The prayers of the funeral mass reinforce that idea, reminding us repeatedly that we are praying for ourselves as well as for the deceased.

### **1 John 3:1-2 *We shall see God as he really is.***

Our deceased loved ones have a distinct advantage over us, who have never seen God as he really is. They are in the presence of God to a degree that we cannot even imagine, for we have never shared such intimacy with our Heavenly Father. They now enjoy what we still long to experience.

This idea that death finally strips away our illusions and gives us clear vision can be helpful in the case of people whose vision was clouded by depression or other forms of mental illness. We can be hopeful that they now see God and themselves more clearly.

**Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7 *There will be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain.***

Although this vision of peace and tranquility has not been realized here on earth, we trust that our deceased loved ones in heaven do experience such freedom from death and mourning, wailing and pain. For them, the old order has passed away.

This passage is appropriate for someone who suffered from addiction, depression, or any other chronic condition. The sense of freedom and relief that the image imparts can be especially helpful if the deceased's chronic condition caused or contributed to his/her death.