

Hubert's Funeral Meditations

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R.O. Kennedy 1959

Funeral Meditations

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." I Cor. 15:57 (RSV)

Moffatt translates this verse very vividly. He says: "The victory is ours, thank God!" It comes almost at the conclusion of Paul's long explanation of his belief in the resurrection. I think I should call it his hymn to the resurrection. He concludes with the words: "Well then, my beloved brothers, hold your ground, immovable; abound in work for the Lord at all times, for you may be sure that in the Lord your labour is never thrown away."

So many people think of death as a restrictive experience. They regard it as an inevitable event that cuts us off and limits us. This is far from the Christian point of view. Actually death may be a liberating experience. Victor Hugo wrote:

"You say, Where goest thou? I cannot tell,
And still go on. If but the way be straight
I cannot go amiss: BEFORE ME LIES
DAWN AND THE DAY: the night behind me: that
Suffices me: I break the bounds: I see,
And nothing more; believe and nothing less.
My future is not one of my concerns

The line that strikes me is: "BEFORE ME LIES DAWN AND THE DAY."

In our lives there are so many things that limit us, that make it impossible for us to do our best even though we want to do it. Then comes that mysterious moment when we are free. We are no longer chained to little things. John Knox has expressed it when he writes: "THE MEANING AND WORTH TO US OF ANOTHER PERSON ARE NEVER SO VIVIDLY CLEAR AS WHEN HE IS TAKEN FROM US, AND AT NO OTHER TIME ARE WE SO LIKELY TO SEE HIS LIFE IN ITS TRUE CHARACTER AND ITS FULL RANGE. ... IT IS NOT THAT ONE BECOMES BLIND TO ANOTHER'S FAULTS WHEN HE DIES, OR DECIDES POLITELY TO IGNORE THEM, BUT THAT ONE SEES THEM NOW IN THE TRUER, AMPLER CONTEXT OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY AND, REMEMBERING ONE'S OWN STRUGGLES AND FAILURES IS MOVED TO SYMPATHY RATHER THAN CENSURE." The liberating character of death. Says Knox, "What was really good in the other is allowed to make its true impression."

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Perhaps I can illustrate what I am trying to say by telling you about a window in my church. It is the chancel window. If you go in the church at night you can see nothing. There are some cloudy days when the window seems dull. But it happens that at this time of the year that the light is just right and if you go in the church around nine in the morning you can see all the beauty of that window. This morning it was all aglow, rich reds and blues seen through the carving of the reredos screen. Our lives are like that. Sometimes death provides just the right light.

I have in my files many notes which I received from Oakley Kennedy through the years. These notes showed two things. First, that although he no longer lived in Troy his heart was here. He followed everything that went on. In a day when people flit from place to place it is quite wonderful to find someone who feels he has real roots in a community. Second, these were often notes of congratulation for something he felt I ought to be congratulated for. I presume many of you have such notes from him. His interest in people always amazed me. His interest in people extended beyond individuals and we know of his concern for the institutions which minister to people--the church, the Y.M.C.A., Russel Sage College and other too numerous to mention. He was a good listener as his ministers can testify. When Oakley Kennedy was in your congregation you knew you were speaking to someone who was thinking along with you. He might not agree but he was always responsive. His real appreciation of humor, of the unusual phrase, of the thought that was just a little different--these are things one remembers with joy. He was generous in his support for every good cause.

Today we honor him as his associates and friends of many years. But most of all we express our faith and our joy that his spirit is free.

Thanks to the Lord who gives us the victory
Bishop Oxnham has written: "I want a chance to express all the love I have failed to reveal. I need eternity for that. I want to grow. So much to know, so little time!" I think this was Oakley Kennedy's wish.

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