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## “ I ENTER THE JOY OF MY BELOVED FATHER ”

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This fourth reflection on Christian funerals would like to draw your attention to the importance of “tasting” our life on earth in order to savour all the more the joys of heaven; I would also want to offer you a beautiful hymn.

### TASTING LIFE ON EARTH

Several years ago, life on earth was seen as a chain of trials to be supported in this valley of tears. Without denying the sometimes harsh aspects of human life, we must nonetheless discover in it the true gift of God. In a beautiful hymn to life, Mother Teresa expresses it this way:

Life is beauty: admire it. Life is blessing: taste it.  
Life is a challenge: face it. Life is a duty: accomplish it.  
Life is precious: care for it. Life is a richness: preserve it.  
Life is love: enjoy it. Life is a mystery: deepen it.  
Life is a promise: fulfill it. Life is a hymn: sing it.  
Life is a battle: accept it. Life is an adventure: dare it.  
Life is happiness: deserve it. Life is life: defend it.  
Life is a gift: give thanks for it.

### “ LIFE IS TRANSFORMED ”

With this hymn in mind, it is comforting to hear these words of the liturgy: *“For your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven”* (Preface for Christian Death I). What more could be written, after such a beautiful profession of faith?...

### JESUS' FAREWELL

As I finish this series of reflections on Christian funerals, I thought it important to return to the last moments of Jesus and to see how he experienced them. Chapters 13 to 17 of St. John's Gospel record Jesus' last farewell to his disciples. His words are filled with hope, a hope that can be ours in difficult times. Here I am thinking at the time of taking leave, at a funeral, especially following the eucharistic celebration, at the moment of the Commendation and Farewell. One can still eulogise the deceased, but I wonder whether it would not be better to recall more especially, rather, Jesus' farewell to his disciples. Before handing his spirit over to his Father, Jesus talked to and prayed with his friends. If we turned to these four chapters of John, we would find there our source of hope, We would taste Jesus' joy in going to the Father. we would also be receiving his final words of advice, to love one another as he has loved us. It was while thinking about all of this that I tried to write a new hymn, summarizing Jesus' deep-felt farewell:

*I am going to my beloved Father;  
There you will find me.*

1. Friends, I give you a new commandment:  
Love one another as I have loved you.
2. As I have loved you, you must love one another.  
In this way will others know that you are my disciples.
3. Believe in God, and believe in me still:  
In my Father's house are many dwellings.
4. After I have gone to prepare a place for you,  
I shall come back and take you with me.
5. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life:  
No one can go to the Father but through me.
6. Let not your hearts be worried, or troubled:  
Be happy and rejoice because I go to my Father.
7. I have daily glorified Him on earth:  
I have accomplished the work He had given me.

If I have but one wish, it is to be able to speak these words when my time comes to go to the Father.

#### **SHORT PRAYERS**

The liturgy has beautiful prayers for the Final Farewell, It is good to recall them, once in a while. Here are two short ones:

"I believe that my Redeemer lives and that at the last day I shall rise again. The day will come when in my flesh I shall see God, my Redeemer. I shall know Him, and with my eyes I shall gaze on Him. My unswerving hope is that I shall once again live in my body."

"Father of infinite goodness, we commend to your care the one who has come to your door. Welcome the one we love. When the darkness of death takes him from our sight, may your everlasting sun rise for him. He is no longer with us, may he be with you! We know your love, you welcome and forgive. Is he not your child from the moment when the waters of baptism gave him life? Through the love of your Son, our beloved one already belongs to you; may he abide in you and share your glory. Dear brother, we leave you with God [à Dieu], and we shall meet again."

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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