

'By your side...'

A selection of poetry, prose and prayers

Vol 9: General Reflections

Entering Death

I pray that you will have the blessing
Of being consoled and sure about your death.
May you know in your soul
There is no need to be afraid.
When your time comes, may you have
Every blessing and strength you need.
May there be a beautiful welcome for you
In the home you are going to.
You are not going somewhere strange,
Merely back to the home you have never left.
May you live with compassion
And transfigure everything
Negative within and about you.
When you come to die,
May it be after a long life.
May you be tranquil
Among those who care for you.
May your going be sheltered
And your welcome assured.
May your soul smile
In the embrace
Of your Anam Cara.

John O'Donohue, Benedictus (p.192)

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General Reflections

For the Dying

May death come gently towards you,
Leaving you time to make your way
Through the cold embrace of fear
To the place of inner tranquillity.
May death arrive only after a long life
To find you at home among your own
With every comfort and care you require.
May your leave-taking be gracious,
Enabling you to hold dignity
Through awkwardness and illness.
May you see the reflection
Of your life's kindness and beauty
In all the tears that fall for you.
As your eyes focus on each face,
May your soul take its imprint,
Drawing each image within
As companions for the journey.
May you find for each one you love
A different locket of jewelled words
To be worn around the heart
To warm your absence.



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General Reflections

For The Dying (continued)

May someone who knows and loves
The complex village of your heart
Be there to echo you back to yourself
And create a sure word-raft
To carry you to the further shore.
May your spirit feel
The surge of true delight
When the veil of the visible
Is raised, and you glimpse again
The living faces
Of departed family and friends.
May there be some beautiful surprise
Waiting for you inside death,
Something you never knew or felt,
Which with one simple touch
Absolves you of all loneliness and loss,
As you quicken within the embrace

For which your soul was eternally made.
May your heart be speechless
At the sight of the truth
Of all your belief had hoped,
Your heart breathless
In the light and lightness
Where each and every thing
Is at last its true self
Within that serene belonging
That dwells beside us
On the other side
Of what we see.

John O'Donohue, Benedictus (p.193)



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General Reflections

For Grief

When you lose someone you love,
Your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you becomes fragile,
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence.
Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.
Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or undone.
There are days when you wake up happy:
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back
Onto the black tide of loss.
Days when you have your heart back,
You are able to function well
Until in the middle of work or encounter,
Suddenly with no warning,
You are ambushed by grief.

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It becomes hard to trust yourself.
All you can depend on now is that
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself.
More than you know, it knows its way
And will find the right time
To pull and pull the rope of grief
Until that coiled hill of tears
Has reduced to its last drop.
Gradually, you will learn acquaintance
With the invisible form of your departed;
And when the work of grief is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All this time.

John O'Donohue, Benedictus (p.132-3)

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General Reflections

For Grief (continued)

To everything, there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

A Blessing for Death

I pray that you will have the blessing of being consoled and sure about your own death. Many you know in your soul that there is no need to be afraid.

When your time comes, may you be given every blessing and shelter that you need. May there be a beautiful welcome for you in the home that you are going to.

You are not going somewhere strange. You are going back to the home that you never left.

May you have a wonderful urgency to live your life to the full.

May you live compassionately and creatively and transfigure everything that is negative within you and about you.

When you come to die may it be after a long life.

May you be peaceful and happy in the presence of those who really care for you. May your going be sheltered and your welcome be assured.

May your soul smile in the embrace of your anam cara.

John O'Donohue, Anam Cara

Lord, support is all the day long,
Until the shadows lengthen and evening comes,

And the busy world is hushed,

And the fever of life is over,

And our work is done.

Then in your mercy,

Grant us a safe lodging

And a holy rest

And peace at last.

Amen.

J.H. Newman