

MEDITATING ON DEATH DURING A PANDEMIC by Fr Thomas Reese SJ Part 1

I'm in [quarantine](#), due to contact with someone who has come down with COVID-19, but I am showing no symptoms.

Nonetheless, my isolation has given me time to think about how we are all going to die one day; we just don't know when. It is easy to ignore death when we are young or in good health, but sickness and other disasters force us to recognize our finitude. A pandemic makes it impossible not to think about death.

Death is the great leveler; it affects the rich and poor, the famous and the humble, the powerful and the weak, saints and sinners.

In the parable of the rich fool in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the story of a rich man who plans to build larger barns for his harvest, but God said to him, "You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?" And Jesus concludes, "Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God."

In the Gospel of [Matthew](#), Jesus also describes how we will be judged after death. "I was hungry and you gave me food," says the Son of Man. And those who were righteous go to eternal life.

The Latin "Memento mori" — "Remember death" — was said to victorious Roman generals, lest they become arrogant and ambitious. The phrase was picked up by spiritual writers to remind Christians that someday they will face judgment.

St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits and a great spiritual guide, recommended meditating on death as part of his "Spiritual Exercises," a series of meditations to help a person on retreat come closer to God and discover what he wants us to do. Ignatius asks the retreatant, if you were on your deathbed looking back on your life, what decisions do you wish you had made? This helps the retreatant review past decisions but, more importantly, think about future decisions.

Here are some things we might think about doing during this pandemic when we meditate on death.

First, we need to think about family. Pope Francis says that the most important words in a family are "Thank you" and "I am sorry."

Granted that the elderly are most susceptible to the coronavirus, call home and say, "Thank you." Thank your parents for all the sacrifices they made for you. Be specific. This may be your last chance. True, they were not perfect parents, but they did the best they could. If you are a parent now, you understand that.

To be concluded tomorrow