



Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 16, 2025
Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Dies Irae

The month of November is traditionally dedicated to the holy souls in purgatory, and it is for us to pray for them and offer our suffrage as they are purified from their earthly faults. But at the same time, we are also reminded of our own mortality and the reality of death that each of us must inevitably face. Mother Church reminds us in these last weeks of the liturgical year of the four last things: death, judgement, heaven and hell.

These will all be set before us one day. And it behooves us to meditate on “that day.” In a very poetic way that meditation was done by Thomas of Celano in the 13th Century in his famous hymn, the Dies Irae. By the 15th century it had found its way into the Requiem Mass as the Sequence. It remains an option in the current Order of Christian Funerals, one which we honor here at the Basilica, when asked for. This famous poem/hymn also finds itself a part of the official worship of the Church as the hymn we will be singing for the various hours of the last week of the liturgical year in the Liturgy of the Hours.

On this penultimate Sunday of the Church’s liturgical year, it behooves us to take this haunting hymn as our meditation on our own mortality and to find in it a source of hope when it is darkest and death surround us.

Dies Irae
Thomas of Celano (13th Century)
Translation- William Josiah Irons (1848)

Day of wrath and doom impending,
David’s word with Sibyl’s blending!
Heaven and earth in ashes ending!

O what fear man’s bosom rendeth
When from heaven the Judge descendeth,
On whose sentence all dependeth!

Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth,
Through earth’s sepulchers it ringeth,
All before the throne it bringeth.

Death is struck, and nature quaking,
All creation is awaking,
To its judge an answer making.

Lo! the book exactly worded,
Wherein all hath been recorded;
Thence shall judgment be awarded.



When the Judge His seat attaineth,
And each hidden deed arraigneth,
Nothing unavenged remaineth.

What shall I, frail man, be pleading?
Who for me be interceding,
When the just are mercy needing?

King of majesty tremendous,
Who dost free salvation send us,
Fount of pity, then befriend us!

Think, kind Jesu, my salvation
Caused Thy wondrous Incarnation;
Leave me not to reprobation.

Faint and weary Thou hast sought me,
On the Cross of suffering bought me;
Shall such grace be vainly brought me?

Righteous Judge! for sin's pollution
Grant Thy gift of absolution,
Ere that day of retribution.

Guilty, now I pour my moaning,
All my shame with anguish owning;
Spare, O God, Thy suppliant groaning!

Through the sinful woman shriven,
Through the dying thief forgiven,
Thou to me a hope hast given.

Worthless are my prayers and sighing,
Yet, good Lord, in grace complying,
Rescue me from fires undying.

With Thy favored sheep O place me,
Nor among the goats abase me,
But to Thy right hand upraise me.

While the wicked are confounded,
Doomed to flames of woe unbounded,
Call me with Thy Saints surrounded.

Low I kneel, with heart submission,
Crushed to ashes in contrition;
Help me in my last condition!



Ah! that day of tears and morning!
From the dust of earth returning,
Man for judgment must prepare him;

Spare, O God, in mercy spare him!
Lord all-pitying, Jesu Blest,
Grant them Thine eternal rest. Amen.

Meditating on this text is sobering and it brings us to a place of honesty and humility before the reality of death. It brings into stark relief our utter poverty. When we stand before the Lord on “that day,” what will we have to offer? As the hymn laments, even the just need mercy, referring to the Biblical passage that says even the just man falls seven times a day (Proverbs 24:16). Before death, we are all paupers who have nothing to offer. We need a savior! Who can save us from “that day”? Jesus is the Answer. The answer is to trust Jesus. The answer is to turn to Jesus.

In the darkness of night that falls upon us in these days of waning daylight when the world experiences death, if you experience any of the anxiety or fear felt in this poetry, turn to Jesus!

If you find yourself in the midst of sin and death or being tempted to despair and lose hope, put your trust in Jesus!

Call upon the grace of your own baptism when Jesus claimed you as a member of His very own body. Invoke the Holy Spirit whose temple you have become, fortified at your Confirmation. Lay claim to the pledge of eternal life you receive every time you humbly receive Holy Communion with the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And have hope.

That day can only be survived through the Body of Christ. Yes, the body has to suffer death – we are not exempt from that – but the Body of Christ has risen from the dead, and you, too, will share in that resurrection if you remain united to the Body in sacramental union with Jesus through His Church.

The answer to “That day” is always Jesus. The Christian is never lost if he cling to Jesus and remains grafted to Him through His bride, the Church.