

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

If you were to die tonight, how certain are you that you'd be saved?

I've been asked that question before, as I'm sure you have too.
It's the old *Evangelism Explosion* question of the 60's and 70's—
and it's never really gone away.

It's one of those questions that's either a "yes" or a "no."
There's no wiggle room with certainty—you are or you aren't.

Now, amazingly, most people that answer this question—
either one way or the other—
are both wrong.

How's that?

Let's start with those who answer "no."
While there are some who truly doubt their salvation,
for most, there's a certain piety or humility that doesn't want to be arrogant.

They'd say, "No one can be certain—
all of us sin; and no one should boast of *certainty*.
Sure, it's likely—but nothing's certain."

It's often followed by something like,
"Well, I'm a good person, but not perfect—nobody's perfect."

On the other hand, those who say, "Yes, I'm certain I'll be saved,"
often base their certainty in a decision they've made or a feeling they've had.

How do you know you'll be saved?
"Because I gave my life to Jesus,"
"I accepted Him into my heart and have decided to follow Him."

In both of these situations the certainty of salvation lies within man.

The first is *uncertain* because he isn't arrogant enough to say he's done well enough.
He knows something's been left out, something's not right—no one's perfect.

The second is *certain* because of a decision or act of the will.

Both are wrong because both put the certainty of salvation in us.

And if any of you have ever made a wrong decision,
 or if your feelings have ever lied to you,
 or if something you've done has come back to haunt you—
 then you can't trust yourself.

You can't trust your decision or your work or your will or your heart.
 Looking within only leads to doubt and despair.

In this world,
 hearts are broken,
 decisions, second-guessed,
 and good works are self-serving.

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” (Eccl 1:2)

Just look around at our world—that's what Ecclesiastes does.
 Look at all that gives certainty in this life.
 Look at your bank accounts, and see how uncertain they really are.
 Look at your investments, your toys, your hard-earned income—
 it could all be gone in a moment.

Look at the works you've done—
 your degrees, your certificates, your accomplishments—
 how long will they be remembered?

Look at the decisions you've made, even the good ones—
 they can be undone in a moment by the next person that comes along.

And yet we all rely on what we've said and done.
 We pat ourselves on the back.
 We relish the compliments, the gifts, and the signs of moving up in this life.
 We go out shopping or drinking as soon as the paycheck comes.
 We say to ourselves: *“relax, eat, drink, be merry.”* (Lk 12:19)

And then the words of our Gospel strike us down:
“Fool! This night your soul is required of you.” (Lk 12:20)

It's hard to think about this today.
 It isn't being asked all that much, or thought about either.
“If you were to die tonight, how certain are you that you'd be saved?”

We're so consumed by the things we have or don't have that we forget entirely about God.

That's what sin does: it curves us entirely in on ourselves.
 And if the certainty of salvation depended on us, we'd be eternally lost.

When we look to ourselves, we have nothing, and all is *vanity*—
that is, all is a breath, a passing whisper, an empty nothing.

That's why St. Paul says,

*“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.
For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* (Col 3:2-3)

In Christ alone there is certainty of salvation.

And you are in Christ!

So if you were to die tonight, you can be absolutely certain that you'll be saved—
not because of anything having to do with you,
whether works or decisions or experiences of the heart—
but because of what Christ has done *for you*.

Faith clings to Christ.

It receives Jesus: His death, His resurrection, and His promise of salvation.

And faith isn't something you've done or brought about either!

Faith is a gift,
created by the word of the Gospel,
given to you *by the hand of God* (Eccl 2:24).

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith.
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”* (Eph 2:8)

And,

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom 10:17)

This faith, this salvation, this Jesus have all come to you as a gift.
They've been given in the waters of Holy Baptism
and they come every time the Preacher declares sins forgiven.

The promise is as sure and certain as the death and resurrection of Christ.

In order for you not to be forgiven and saved,
you'd have to undo your baptism,
close your ears to the good news,
and run from this altar as far as you can.

You'd have to get Jesus back in the tomb,
or off the cross;
and pour all the blood back into His body;
and lock Him away so that He couldn't die for you.

You'd have to undo His love.

And that, dear Christians, not even *you* can do.

The things of this life:
 our money and possessions,
 our reputation and honor,
 our skills and decisions and desires—
 all of these are vanity.

Do not trust in them;
 they might be taken from you this very night.

But Jesus—
 He's eternal, He's true; He's yours;
 and you can never be taken from Him.

*“Here there is not Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised,
 barbarian, Scythian, [Kansan, Okie, or Michigander],
 slave, or free; [doctor, teacher, or retired military;]
 but Christ is all, and in all.” (Col 3:11)*

And that includes you.

For you have been baptized into Christ.
 And whatever goes for Christ, goes for you—
 of that you can be certain.

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