

Girolamo Savonarola



Do you wish to be free? Then
above all things, love God, love
your neighbor, love one
another, love the common weal;
then you will have true liberty.

An excerpt from Sermon XXVIII - The Art of Dying Well

Delivered by Savonarola on All Souls' Day, November 2, 1496

This morning, then, since I want to speak of the art of dying well and, as I said yesterday morning, to give you a bit to chew on, we do not want to tire ourselves in proving that man has to die, because this would be superfluous, and you would say, "Father, you are wasting time; we know that we have to die," and so, I want to leave that aside and try to persuade you that man should seek to have this concern always fixed in his mind, that he has to die, and I will show that the man who thinks about death extracts great fruit therefrom and that, certainly, if a man held to this thought continuously, he would be blessed. All the saintly men of the past have had this thoughtfulness about death, which made them live in this world with great rectitude, so much so that they are now in the beatitude of Paradise. So, the thought of death is a thing very useful to man, because, in the Christian religion, the beginning and the middle are of no use apart from the end.

Therefore, it is necessary to think always about making a good end, and this is to think always about death. And so, the sage in Ecclesiasticus states the theme we have proposed: *In omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis*, that is, "in all your works, O man, remember your last days," that is, your end. Remember, man, that you have to die and, having this remembrance always fixed [in your mind], *in aeternum non peccabis*, that is, "you will not commit any sin." Now, dearly beloved, we will speak about death and give everyone a prescription for dying well. First, I will speak of those who are healthy, who ought to think that at any hour they may grow sick and die. Then we will speak about those who have already begun to sicken, how they ought to think of death. Third, we will speak about those who are gravely ill and are confined to bed, virtually in extremis, what they also ought to do.

God give us grace to speak of this death in such a way that it will be strongly impressed in your brains so that you might bring forth fruit from this preaching. If I had told you, [my] people, that I want to prove to you through reason, authority, and example that man has to die, you would say that this was foolishness. Similarly, it seems foolishness to me that man, although he knows he has to die, does not want to think about death, but rather, all his concern seems to be thinking about how to stay here and build beautiful palaces and amass possessions and so to become rich. On such as this, it seems, man would expend all his thought, but about death and the next life, it seems he thinks not at all, as though the hereafter were of no account. Oh, what foolishness is this, to think only of the here and now!

Source: <http://traditio-op.org/biblioteca/Savonarola/Selected-Writings-of-Girolamo-Savonarola-Religion-and-Politics-1490%E2%80%93931498.pdf> (full sermon starts on page 72 pf the PDF)