

Chapter 12

Last Thoughts

July–August 1943

After being sentenced to death on July 6, 1943, Franz Jägerstätter lived from one day to the next without knowing when he would be executed. He apparently coped with each day by writing his reflections on "What Every Christian Should Know" (pages 214–233 above) and also by occasionally expressing his thoughts in an away addressed to Franziska and his family. Whereas he manifests a meditative, almost serene spirit in "What Every Christian Should Know," he conveys his passion and pain in the few texts that somehow eventually reached his wife. Since Franz speaks in these letters of his refusal to take the military oath of unconditional obedience to the Führer, he was likely prompted in part to write these essays as a follow-up to his twenty-minute meeting with his wife and pastor on July 13. Since these texts did not receive headings from Franz Jägerstätter, they are listed here according to their archive numbers. [RK]

Text no. 84

Who fares better in this world: the person who places earthly life before eternal life or the person who puts eternal life before earthly life?

What does this life offer to those who prize eternal life more than earthly life? Many people usually regard believers as buffoons. They hold that these believers get in this life nothing other than work and concern and suffering. But this is not completely true. There is much work in this world that cannot be paid for with earthly recompense. Believers are fortunate and at peace because they know that God will reward them with eternal riches. They know that no suffering need occur for itself alone since God will reward everything with abundant recompense.

People are unfortunate if they sin, for sin is the greatest evil and misfortune that exists in general for human beings. As long as people live in serious sin, they gather for themselves not the least merit for eternal life.

How well do things go for unbelievers who place earthly life ahead of eternal life or who no longer believe in eternal life? They do not need to work at anything, and they decrease what they care about. They have nothing to suffer for, or they seek payment for their suffering. But can they avoid difficult times or elude death?

Unbelievers often experience good fortune. But bitter regrets and serious woes unfortunately usually follow such times. Moreover, even in good times something can happen that is not supposed to occur, and then a person can come into conflict with this world's laws.

Do unbelievers still find something enjoyable if they turn to food and drink and simply seek to satisfy themselves for many days or even for many years? I believe that they do not, for the more we live in moderation, the more we find ourselves in good health. So who fares better in this world: believers or unbelievers?

Text no. 85

Franz Jägerstätter wrote this next reflection in red crayon on an unfolded piece of stiff paper of the kind used for "a letter-card":

My dear loved ones, the hour draws ever nearer when I shall give my soul back to God, the Lord. I could say many words of farewell to you, and it is hard to imagine saying no more good-byes to you.

I would have gladly spared you the pain and the suffering that you have borne on account of me. But you surely know that we must love God more than we love our family, and that we must be ready to let go of everything that we love on this earth and that is dear to us rather than to offend God in the least. And I would not dare to offend God on account of you. We know what suffering God could have sent you on account of me!

It was surely hard for our dear Savior to give his dear mother pain because of his death. And what are our sufferings in relation to those which those two innocent hearts suffered for us sinners? Moreover, what must a farewell [at death] be for those people who do not fully believe in eternal life and who, therefore, do not have much hope for a reunion? If I could not have trusted in God's mercy and forgiveness for all of my sins, then I would have hardly had peaceful days during my solitary time in prison.

Although people have accused me of criminal behavior and condemned me to death, be consoled knowing that in God's eyes not everything is criminal

that the world perceives to be criminal. I hope that I do not have to be afraid of the eternal Judge because of this [so-called] criminal behavior.

My death sentence should be a warning for you. God, the Lord, will not treat us much differently if we perhaps think that we do not need to obey everything which he commands us to believe and follow through his church. However, [if we do not follow God's Commandments,] the eternal Judge will condemn us not merely to an earthly death but to an eternal death.

Therefore, I have nothing more urgent to set before you than that you resolve to keep all of the Commandments and to avoid every sin. You should love God, our Lord, and also your neighbors as yourself [see Mark 12:28-34]. On these two Commandments rest the entire law. Keep these, and then we have reason to hope for an imminent reunion in heaven.

One must not think poorly of others who act differently than I have. It is much better for everyone to pray than to pass judgment on others. God intends that everyone should become holy.

Many people simply believe that things must be as they are, that they should do what is unjust, and that others have responsibility for this [situation]. They also hold that whoever has the mind and the will should be able and willing to obey all regulations. For them, to take the military oath is not to lie. However, someone else may say beforehand: "If I cannot uphold and obey everything that I promise in this oath, then I commit a lie." I am of the mind that it is best that I tell the truth, even if it costs me my life: I cannot obey [the oath] in all of its aspects.¹

Neither God nor the church gives a commandment requiring that we must — under the burden of sin — commit ourselves in an oath to obey [human] authorities in all matters. So do not have a heavy heart when others declare that I am sinner. You can have peace of mind if you take [my love of] my family as evidence [concerning me]. For it is because of my family that I am not permitted to lie, not even if I had ten children. My greatest request is the one that I have already conveyed to you: raise the children to be devout Catholics as much as it is possible for you. They do not yet have a great understanding of [Catholicism].

1. As already noted, according to defense attorney Felhmann the Reich's Military Tribunal might have considered its death sentence of [F] if he would have taken the military oath. But [F] told Franziška Lagerstätter and Pastor Fritzbauer on July 13 that since he would be lying, if he were to take the oath, he would not take it. Here [F] reiterates this point. See Zahn, *In Solitary Witness*, 84–96, [16].

Out of my own experience I can say that life is painful when one lives as a lukewarm Christian. To exist in this way is to have more the existence of a vegetable than truly to live. If a person were to possess all of this world's wisdom and be able to claim half of the earth as his own, he could and would still be less fortunate than a poor person who can claim nothing in this world as his own other than a deep Catholic faith. I would not exchange my small, dirty cell for a king's palace if I was required to give up even a small part of my faith. All that is earthly — no matter how much, nor how beautiful — comes to an end. But God's Word is eternal.

I can assure you that if you — in the state of grace — would merely pray with reverence the Our Father for the children, you would give them a greater gift than if you could give them the greatest wedding gift that a millionaire could give his daughter. Many people would laugh at these words. But they are true.

Now my dear children, when your mother reads you this letter, your father will already be dead. I would have gladly come to you, but the heavenly Father wanted it otherwise. Be well-behaved and obedient children. Pray for your father so that we shall see each other soon in heaven!

My dear wife and my mother, forgive me for all the ways in which I have offended you and have made you suffer. I surely forgive you. And I ask that everyone in Radeburg, whom I have made suffer and have offended, forgive me.

Also, give my greetings to Hilda.²

Text no. 86

Franz Jagersstätter wrote the text below — similar to text no. 85 above — in tiny print on a piece of stiff paper that was used for "a letter-card":

Who can fully appreciate the value of a Catholic's deep and devout faith? No one except God. It is not a free choice but a duty for a Catholic to believe everything that God has presented for us to believe in Catholic doctrine. It is also a duty to uphold all of the laws of God and the church.

To be devout Christians and to strive after sanctity is nothing more than to seek to fulfill God's will in everything. Such Christians may still of course sin, even though they believe everything that God has taught us to believe and to

2. [F] is referring to his daughter Hildegard Auer.

ST. BASIL OF CAESAREA (Letter 5)

To Nectarius.

1. I heard of your unendurable loss, and was much distressed. Three or four days went by, and I was still in some doubt because my informant was not able to give me any clear details of the melancholy event. While I was incredulous about what was reported abroad, because I prayed that it might not be true, I received a letter from the Bishop fully confirming the unhappy tidings. I need not tell you how I sighed and wept. Who could be so stony-hearted, so truly inhuman, as to be insensible to what has occurred, or be affected by merely moderate grief? He is gone; heir of a noble house, prop of a family, a father's hope, offspring of pious parents, nursed with innumerable prayers, in the very bloom of manhood, torn from his father's hands. These things are enough to break a heart of adamant and make it feel. It is only natural then that I am deeply touched at this trouble; I who have been intimately connected with you from the beginning and have made your joys and sorrows mine. But yesterday it seemed that you had only little to trouble you, and that your life's stream was flowing prosperously on. In a moment, by a demon's malice, all the happiness of the house, all the brightness of life, is destroyed, and our lives are made a doleful story. If we wish to lament and weep over what has happened, a lifetime will not be enough and if all mankind mourns with us they will be powerless to make their lamentation match our loss. Yes, if all the streams run tears they will not adequately weep our woe.

2. But we mean — do we not?— to bring out the gift which God has stored in our hearts; I mean that sober reason which in our happy days is wont to draw lines of limitation round our souls, and when troubles come about us to recall to our minds that we are but men, and to suggest to us, what indeed we have seen and heard, that life is full of similar misfortunes, and that the examples of human sufferings are not a few. Above all, this will tell us that it is God's command that we who trust in Christ should not grieve over them who are fallen asleep, because we hope in the resurrection; and that in reward for great patience great crowns of glory are kept in store by the Master of life's course. Only let us allow our wiser thoughts to speak to us in this strain of music, and we may perhaps discover some slight alleviation of our trouble. Play the man, then, I implore you; the blow is a heavy one, but stand firm; do not fall under the weight of your grief; do not lose heart. Be perfectly assured of this, that though the reasons for what is ordained by God are beyond us, yet always what is arranged for us by Him Who is wise and Who loves us is to be accepted, be it ever so grievous to endure. He Himself knows how He is appointing what is best for each and why the terms of life that He fixes for us are unequal. There exists some reason incomprehensible to man why some are sooner carried far away from us, and some are left a longer while behind to bear the burdens of this painful life. So we ought always to adore His loving kindness, and not to repine, remembering those great and famous words of the great athlete Job, when he had seen ten children at one table, in one short moment, crushed to death, The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Job 1:21 As the Lord thought good so it came to pass. Let us adopt those marvellous words. At the hands of the righteous Judge, they who show like good deeds shall receive a like reward. We have not lost the lad; we have restored him to the Lender. His life is not destroyed; it is changed for the better. He whom we love is not hidden in the ground; he is received into heaven. Let us wait a little while, and we shall be once more with him. The time of our separation is not long, for in this life we are all like travellers on a journey, hastening on to the same shelter. While one has reached his rest another arrives, another hurries on, but one and the same end awaits them all. He has outstripped us on the way, but we shall all travel the same road, and the same hostelry awaits us all. God only grant that we through goodness may be likened to his purity, to the end that for the sake of our guilelessness of life we may attain the rest which is granted to them that are children in Christ.

Beane post on hope

1 message

Pastor Boyle <pastor.boyle@gmail.com>
To: Geoff Boyle <pastor.boyle@gmail.com>

Sat, Jun 6, 2020 at 7:52 PM

Dear friends:

It is impossible for Grace and me to answer every Facebook comment and PM and text regarding your condolences and support following the death of our dear son Leo. There simply are far too many. We are replying to everyone who sent cards and letters to us with the following card. And so to all of you who offered condolences across cyberspace, this is for you as well.

One of my clergy brothers sent us the beautiful letter from St. Basil (330-379 AD) to a friend who suffered a similar loss - of which Grace and I included an excerpt in our card. The entire letter can be read here: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202005.htm>

Bishop Basil wasn't merely a theologian, but also a pastor, a Seelsorger, one engaged in soul-care. And the terrible circumstances we suffered are not unique to us - they were addressed by pastors even in the 4th century, and suffering the death of a son dates back to Adam and Eve. The saints are not only examples for us to emulate, but by their words, they continue to comfort us even through the veil of time and place. We look forward to meeting Basil in the fullness of time.

Thank you to everyone who rallied to our sides, like a great army. Indeed, we are at war in this life. There are casualties. Leo fell on the battlefield, and Grace and I were grievously wounded. But you did not leave us. Like shock troops, you came to all of us, bandaged our wounds, placed us on your shoulders, and airlifted us to safety. You have continued to apply the balm of care to our wounds and the medicine of love to our souls. Leo was given a warrior's burial, and Grace and I continue to recover, and have begun to return to battle.

We will not entirely heal, not on this side of the grave. We are scarred and disfigured and will remain so for the rest of our lives here in time. But we know that we will again be reunited in the flesh on the Last Day, restored, made whole, and never again to be separated. This promise impels us on. Our circumstances have changed, but our orders have not. And it is in serving that we ourselves are served.

And by your heroic help and aid, your presence and prayers, your offerings of meals and financial generosity, your words of strength and support - you have, and continue, to provide soul-care to us. And like the parts of the body, each of you has served in a unique way, reflecting your individual gifts under the headship of Christ.

Dear friends from all around the world, those whom we know well, and those whom we have never met in person - thank you for your prayers, your words, and your deeds. We are grateful beyond measure, to you and to our risen and merciful Lord. And we await that great and glorious day when we will rise in our flesh, to see Leo again, and Basil, and all the saints, and with them, to see our blessed Lord in the flesh, and to worship Him, in the Unity of the Trinity, with all of you for eternity.

Thank you once again. And since the Church lives in the reality of the resurrection, though it is liturgically out of place, let us again confess: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Sent from my iPhone