

Dies Iræ

DIES IRÆ, dies illa,
Solvat sæclum in favilla:
Teste David cum Sibylla.
2. Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando Iudex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus.
3. Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.
4. Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Iudicanti responsura.
5. Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus iudicetur.
6. Iudex ergo cum sedebit,
Quidquid latet, apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit.
7. Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?
Quem patronum rogaturus?
Cum vix iustus sit securus?
8. Rex tremendæ majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis.
9. Recordare, Iesu, pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ:
Ne me perdas ilia die.
10. Quærens me, sedisti lassus:
Redemisti crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus.
11. Iuste Iudex ultionis,
Donum fac remissionis
Ante diem rationis.
12. Ingemisco tamquam reus:
Culpa rubet vultus meus:
Supplicanti parce, Deus.
13. Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.
14. Preces meæ non sunt dignæ;
Sed tu bonus fac benigne
Ne perenni cremer igne.
15. Inter oves locum præsta,
Et ab hædis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra.
16. Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acerbis addictis:
Voca me cum benedictis.
17. Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis:
Gere curam mei finis.
18. Lacrimosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favilla,
Iudicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce, Deus:
19. Pie Iesu, Domine,
Dona eis requiem.

THAT DAY OF WRATH, that dreadful day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
Both David and the Sibyl say.
2. What terror then shall us befall,
When lo, the Judge's steps appall,
About to sift the deeds of all.
3. The mighty trumpet's marvellous tone
Shall pierce through each sepulchral stone
And summon all before the throne.
4. Now Death and Nature in amaze
Behold the Lord His creatures raise,
To meet the Judge's awful gaze.
5. The books are opened, that the dead
May have their doom from what is read,
The record of our conscience dread.
6. The Lord of judgement sits Him down,
And every secret thing makes known;
No crime escapes His vengeful frown.
7. Ah, how shall I that day endure?
What patron's friendly voice secure,
When scarce the just themselves are sure?
8. O King of dreadful majesty,
Who grantest grace and mercy free,
Grant mercy now and grace to me.
9. Good Lord, 'twas for my sinful sake,
That Thou our suffering flesh didst take;
Then do not now my soul forsake.
10. In weariness Thy sheep was sought;
Upon the Cross His life was bought;
Alas, if all in vain were wrought.
11. O just avenging Judge, I pray,
For pity take my sins away,
Before the great accounting-day.
12. I groan beneath the guilt, which Thou
Canst read upon my blushing brow;
But spare, O God, Thy suppliant now.
13. Thou Who didst Mary's sins unbind,
And mercy for the robber find,
Dost fill with hope my anxious mind.
14. My feeble prayers can make no claim,
Yet, gracious Lord, for Thy great Name,
Redeem me from the quenchless flame.
15. At Thy right hand, give me a place
Among Thy sheep, a child of grace,
Far from the goats' accursed race.
16. Yea, when Thy justly kindled ire
Shall sinners hurl to endless fire,
Oh, call me to Thy chosen choir.
17. In suppliant prayer I prostrate bend,
My contrite heart like ashes rend,
Regard, O Lord, my latter end.
18. Oh, on that day, that tearful day,
When man to judgement wakes from clay,
Be Thou the trembling sinner's stay.
And spare him, God, we humbly pray.
19. Yea, grant to all, O Saviour Blest,
Who die in Thee, the Saints' sweet rest.

MEANING and TRANSLATION of *DIES IRÆ*

THE *DIES IRÆ* is a meditation on the text, "That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress," Sophonias (Zephaniah) 1:1,15-16. It quotes Our Lord in Matthew 25.

"The exquisite beauty of the Latin original has continually lured translators to attempt to reproduce this noble hymn in the vernacular," said Father Matthew Britt O.S.B. in *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*, in 1922. "Its poetry gives us a new conception of the power of the Latin tongue. Its wonderful wedding of sense and sound..."

The greatest of the Anglican translators of Latin and Greek hymns, Dr Mason Neale, said: "The *Pange lingua* [preeminently the hymn of the Most Blessed Sacrament] contests the second place among hymns of the Western Church with the *Vexilla Regis*, the *Stabat Mater*, the *Iesu dulcis memoria*, the *Ad regias Agni dapes*, the *Ad supernam*, and one or two others, leaving the *Dies Iræ* in its unapproachable glory." (ibid.)

"It is very probable," says Fr Britt, "that the *Dies Iræ* was composed as a sequence for the first Sunday of Advent." It remains to our day as the Sequence before the Gospel in the Tridentine Requiem Mass, Its omission from the *Novus Ordo* Missal is tragic.

In any event, the new Breviary (*The Liturgy of the Hours*, or Divine Office, the Work of God), in its Latin edition at least, preserves the *Dies Iræ* as an option for the weekdays of the final week of the liturgical year, between Christ the King and the First Sunday of Advent, spread over the Office of Readings (or Matins), Lauds and Vespers. Few folk know this.

Perhaps it is a compensation for the transferral of the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King from the last Sunday of October, "towards the end of the liturgical year" as Pope Pius XI said in 1925 when he instituted it, to the *Novus Ordo* arrangement of Pope Paul VI, which has it on the 34th and Last Sunday of the ordinary time. Pope Paul intended that the liturgical year would come to a climactic conclusion. Previously, the Church's year had faded out gradually. Several of the concluding Sundays after Pentecost had the same Introit: "I think thoughts of peace and not of affliction, says the Lord". This is now the Entrance Antiphon for the 33rd Ordinary Sunday. The former Offertory Verse was also repeated over several Sundays: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord". There was an expectancy, just a hint of Advent. It was better liturgical psychology.

Changing the date of Christ the King has made it more difficult to think of the First Sunday of Advent as the grand issuing in of a new Christian Year. There is an insurmountable psychological difficulty in trying to have a grand conclusion to one year and, a week later, a grand start to the next.

Further, this change of date compounds our other difficulties in keeping Advent. In the Church, we begin our New Year nearly a month ahead of our secular neighbours. Perhaps this is a symbol of our role as the salt of the earth, and the light and conscience of the world. We are trying to observe a penitential expectancy, while our neighbours are anticipating Christmas with parties, which double as

end-of-the-year parties. Further, we are called to a renewed effort at a time when most of us are worn out, and just coasting through till we can flop at Christmas. **THERE WERE**, in 1895, already 234 recorded English translations of this world-famous hymn. "To preserve, in connection with the utmost fidelity and strictness of rendering, all the rhythmic merits of the Latin original; to attain to a vital likeness as well as an exact literalness, at the same time that nothing is sacrificed of its musical sonorousness and billowy grandeur, easy and graceful in its swing as the ocean on its bed; to make the verbal copy, otherwise cold and dead, glow with the fire of lyric passion; to reflect, and that too by means of a single version, the manifold aspects of the many-sided original, exhausting at once its wonderful fulness and pregnancy; to cause the white light of the primitive so to pass through the medium of another language and not undergo any refraction whatever would be desirable, certainly, were it practicable; but it were unreasonable to expect it in a single version." (idid.)

"Rhyme, alliteration, cadence, and adjustment of vowel and consonant values, all these things receive perfect expression in it. Reflect upon the careful art or felicitous accident of such a line as: *Tuba mirum spargens sonum*, with the thud of the trochee falling in each instant on a different vowel; and still more the continuous sequence of stanzas 6 to 10, in which a word could not be displaced or replaced by another without loss."

Stanzas 1 to 6 picture with remarkable brevity and detail the Judgement scene of the Scriptures.

Stanzas 7 to 19 are lyric in character and express the anguish of one of the multitude there present in spirit: his pleading before the Judge, who, while on earth, sought him unceasingly from Bethlehem to Calvary; and now, in anticipation of the Judgement, pleads before a Saviour of infinite mercy, who, on Judgement Day, will be a Judge of infinite justice, before whom scarcely the just will be secure.

Stanza 7 connects the descriptive and lyric parts: the soul acknowledges the futility of expecting aid from creatures — for even the Saints and Angels will be judged.

Stanza 8 presents Christ in His kingly justice and saving mercy.

Stanzas 9 to 14 develop the thought of God's mercy: 9-11 on the basis of Christ's labour and sufferings, 12-14 on the basis of the sinner's repentance.

Stanza 15 contrasts the Scriptural sheep and goats; and 16 pictures the Judgement with the Scriptural "Come ye blessed" and "depart ye cursed".

FINALLY, here is a summary by Sir Walter Scott — in 1814, in his first novel *Waverley* he had lamented the Protestant children's ignorance of the Creed and the Ten Commandments — in his poem *His Lay of the Last Minstrel* of 1805.

THAT DAY OF WRATH, that dreadful day,
When heav'n and earth shall pass away,
What power shall be the sinner's stay?
How shall he meet that dreadful day?
2. When, shrivelling like a parched scroll,
The flaming heav'ns together roll;
When louder yet, and yet more dread,
Swell the high trump that wakes the dead.
3. O, on that day, that wrathful day,
When man to judgement wakes from clay,
Be Thou the trembling sinner's stay,
Though heav'n and earth shall pass away.