The Last Week

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Abstract

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IN THE days before Galileo, when all Truth was to be found in the Scriptures and in Aristotle, there was in a certain monastery a monk called Timothy. It was at the funeral of Timothy that all of his brothers were marveling at his last week here on earth:

John, "Indeed, not one wink of sleep during the last week!"
And Andrew, "Not one mouthful of food."
And Horatio, "Good works, God-like works, through all the days and nights without ceasing."
Then Augustus, the oldest and the wisest, "Truly, we have seen the visitation of God in our brother. Timothy must surely have known of His intentions and experienced His divine presence for such fortitude."

And well the brothers had reason to marvel, for here was Timothy, with no outward intimation of death so early in life, yet surely knowing of it, for how else could the selfless activities of his last week be explained?

Now in the monastery, it was the custom that the brothers would assemble for a period each day to discuss problems suggested within their membership. Shortly before the week-long fast and demise of Timothy, Horatio rose and said, "I have a problem to propose for discussion."
"Hear, hear."
"The problem is, How many teeth are there in a horse's mouth?" he continued, unaware that this would prove to be a genuine dilemma.

Since Timothy was one of the younger monks, one of his duties was to carry water from the well up to the monastery. Near this well was a slough in which were the remains of several farm animals, and among these was the skull of a horse. Timothy had once, purely out of curiosity, counted the teeth in that skull,
so that he alone of the brothers knew, as fact, how many teeth were in a horse's mouth.

When Horatio had presented the question, two schools of thought were formed immediately, one being headed by Andrew, the other by James.

Andrew argued, "Of course it stands to reason that a horse has more teeth than a man. Its head is larger, its jaws are larger and have more room for teeth than a man's."

But James disagreed, "After all, a horse's head is no wider than a man's, and its teeth are much larger than man's, so surely, a horse cannot possibly have as many teeth as a man."

When James spoke, about half of the brothers called, "Hear, hear," and other exclamations signifying their approval of his logical reasonings. And when Andrew was speaking, about a like number showed their support for his side of the question. But Timothy was in neither one school or the other, and was becoming increasingly perplexed. Should he speak out with what he knew were the facts, or remain silent in the presence of these older and wiser brothers. In the end he was silent, as difference of opinions grew more and more violent. As the period drew to a close with no solution, the problem was postponed until the next day.

Now each faction searched in the Scriptures and in Aristotle for light on this puzzling question, but nowhere could they find any evidence concerning the number of teeth in a horse's mouth. So in the discussion period the following day the arguments ran very much as they had the day preceding. But all the while, Timothy was becoming more and more perplexed. Perhaps he should not know the exact number of teeth. All those older brothers did not know, and were they not more learned and wiser than he?

In this way, the discussion continued for the better part of a week. No one could find any trace of the answers in the books of Truth, and Timothy became more acutely aware of his secret guilt. He kept trying to forget the number, but the harder he tried, the more indelibly it stamped itself into his mind.

Then at last, the abbot concluded the problem with the pronouncement: "This problem is indeed unsolvable. We have searched the Scriptures for light, but in vain. Aristotle says nothing about it. Therefore, we may safely assume that the
number of teeth in a horse's mouth is unknowable except to God alone."

At that moment, Timothy was stricken with remorse at knowing that which was sacred to God alone, and unknowable among men. He could scarcely conceal his agony. Never again did he eat or sleep on earth. All the hours of the day and night he was busy, not wasting a moment, copying the words of Truth, aiding the poor, ministering to the sick, helping his brothers in their works, doing all manner of God-like projects in atonement for his secret sin.

Seven nights and seven days he carried on unceasingly, and the agony of his soul transcended the outcries of his flesh.

After the second day, James asked, "Timothy, you have not eaten for two days. Do you not hunger?"

Timothy replied, "No, James, I do not hunger for the food of our table."

And the brothers wondered.

After the fourth day, Horatio queried, "Timothy, do you not thirst?"

"No, I do not thirst."

Then after six days, Andrew said, "Timothy, you have not slept for nearly a week; are you not weary?"

"No, Andrew, I am not weary."

At the end of the seventh day, as the veil of dusk was descending upon the land, they found the body of Timothy at the gate to the monastery.

"How did he die?" wondered Andrew. "He was not ill."

"He met with no accident, that is plain," added James.

"But he had no last rites!" said Horatio, and perplexity grew in the minds of the brothers, especially as they remembered the words and the works of the last week.

The life in the monastery continued in wonderment and speculation, and each of the brothers reexamined privately his own heart to find the kinship with the Lord displayed by Timothy during his last week.