
Yes, It's Cowardice.

"Dear Father: Evidently Joyce Kilmer attributes to mental cowardice the suicide of the young poet in the poem that appeared in the Bulletin last night. A fellow whom I know quite intimately entertains views on life at least similar to those of the unfortunate poet, and yet I am not inclined to classify him as a mental coward.

"His life has been a series of broken dreams, defeated hopes, and disappointments. His future is most dubious - a crisis is approaching in his life and all indications are that its results will be at best an uncertain miserable existence with little hope of betterment. Through it all he has been a fair practicing Catholic, but today his attitude is one of hopelessness and almost despair; the future holds nothing for him, and according to his way of thinking it would be a blessing if now, while he is in the state of grace, God would take him. -- Upperclassman."

Yes, it's cowardice, this suicide business. Perhaps your friend isn't a coward; it's not a legitimate conclusion that you seem to draw. If he has met all the crises thus far it's quite likely that he isn't. He may lack patience and longanimity, but he can increase his supply of these by prayer and the Sacraments.

If we pray for death in the state of grace, why shouldn't we wish it? To wish it now, simply to avoid trouble, is lack of patience and conformity to the will of God; to wish it now, to enjoy the Beatific Vision or to avoid possible future sin, is a holy wish common to the Saints.

Courage in the face of difficulties is a Gift of the Holy Ghost, and it supplies human nature, miserable human nature, with the material for the heroic. It supplies much of the inspiration in this world and most of the sweetness. Can you imagine anything more sweet than the face of an old lady who has, through a long life of adversity, kept going with courage, patience, and conformity to the will of God? (Some old men have such faces, too.)

There is a virtue called detachment. The Devil said that Job lacked this virtue, and God permitted him to try the patience of that patriarch to the breaking point. After Job had lost wealth, home, family, and friends, and had been troubled "with a grievous ulcer" that covered him from head to foot, Job still said, in spite of the advice of his cronies: "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job crossed up the Devil. Blessed shall we be if we follow the example of holy Job and thank God for the afflictions that remind us that "we have not here a lasting city."

If we can once get it into our heads that we are on this earth for only a little while, and that the less importance we attach to the things of this world the happier we will be, we will have laid the groundwork for true happiness, even in this life. The depression has brought forth some beautiful examples of charity among the unfortunate. Father O'Connor, pastor of the negro parish in South Bend, tells of a little colored boy who asked him to pass up the boy's home with the last loaf of bread and give it to a white man in a hut across the street. "So had breakfast," the boy said, "and I know that he didn't even have any supper last night."

Yes, it's cowardice to "take the easy way out" and assume eternal troubles for temporal ones. There have been few suicides among the poor during the depression, but many among the once-rich. The poor have learned detachment by practice. Those who place their happiness in health, wealth, or friends, have lost their all when they lose one of these. True Catholics take their burdens to the Lord, who never fails them.