**Saint Peter Damian’s *Letter* 15**

***On the Death of a Young Child***

**Introduction**

To Sir Amelric, a gentleman of senatorial rank, and to his noble wife, Ermilina, the monk Peter the Sinner sends greetings in the Lord.

(2) You should be aware, my dear friends, that when I learned that your son had departed this world at Almighty God’s command, I was overcome with instant sorrow, and bitter pangs of compassion pierced my heart. But when after some consideration I began to think over the situation, I found that I was at fault, and with humble prayer I urge your excellencies to lay aside your grief. For how precious was your devotion in the sight of the omnipotent God that in his justice he should grant you such a favor? He has brought a child of his flesh to the kingdom of heaven, placed him among the angels, clothed him with a garment of immortality, and crowned him with a diadem of everlasting glory. He has gathered him into his own arms, kissed him like a loving father, and as his own son took him with joy into his own eternally restful bedchamber.

(3) How unhappy and miserable we are, and I speak not only for myself but for fellow-sinners like me, for that which we can hardly hope to attain by fasting and constant, unremitting engagement in battle against the evil spirits, he received freely without the slightest sweat or labor, arriving at the wedding feast of those blessed souls in the city of God without any fatigue or effort in battle. To this I may add that he took your son from your midst, loved him more for his own sake than for yours, and made him an adopted son, is powerful enough to grant you something much better, and in the place of one child cause you to bear many others.

(4) Remember that Hannah the wife of Elkanah brought her only son to the tabernacle where he would constantly serve in performing the ceremonies God has commanded, and, as Scripture attests, lent him to the Lord as if on interest.[[1]](#endnote-1) And so it was that this holy woman said to the high priest Eli: “I prayed and the Lord has given me what I asked. I now I lend him to the Lord for his whole life during which he is lent to the Lord.[[2]](#endnote-2) And the high priest Eli said to Elkanah: “The Lord grant you children by this woman in place of the one which you lent to the Lord.”[[3]](#endnote-3) But in return for what one lends at interest, one receives not merely the exact sum, but the increment as well. And so Scripture at once continues: “The Lord showed his care for Hannah, and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

(5) If he, therefore, granted such a wealth of children in place of one son, how much more able is he to bless you with children born of your conjugal love, he who did not press your son into the service of an earthly tabernacle, but rather assigned him to reign forever in the heavenly Jerusalem in the presence of his majesty?

(6) And so, my dear friends, away with tears, restrain your groans and sighing. May every sign of sorrow vanish from your face, and may festive joy totally replace the dejection you once experienced. Let your blessed good sense prompt you to say with King David: “While the boy was still alive, I fasted and wept for him, thinking, ‘It may be that the Lord will be gracious to me and the boy may live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him; he will not come back to me.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

(7) Wherefore, my dear friends, put aside all signs of sorrow and bereavement, restore to your home the accustomed gayness of spiritual joy, lift your spirit in the hope of celestial consolation, and bear the blows of the Lord not only patiently and calmly, but even with eagerness. May almighty God who deigned to take your son from your embrace, and with a father’s love removed him to his own beloved arms, grant you many children to replace this child, offspring, moreover, who because of their good works will never die.

1. Cf. 1 Sam 2.20. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 1 Sam 1.27-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 1 Sam 2.20. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 1 Sam 2.21. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. 2 Sam 12.22-23. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)