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MORE GLORY IN HEAVEN

John 17:11-19

New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition

¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that^[a] you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost,^[b] so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.^[c] ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.^[d] ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

St. Catherine of Sienna

JESUS said I AM THE WAY, the Truth and the LIFE. Jesus is the way to Heaven, the only Way. When we walk with Jesus to Heaven, our soul is already in Heaven. Yes, the entire Way to Heaven is Heaven.

These seven words of Saint Catherine remind us that we truly can find the Peace of Heaven on earth despite all the sufferings and tribulations we face. When we believe that Jesus Christ came to earth to save us and give us eternal life, when we believe that Jesus Christ forgives all our sins, when we repent and go to confession, and when we believe that Jesus Christ is really present in the EUCHARIST; Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, we can believe that we are on our Way to Heaven through the GRACE of God (not by our action). Heaven begins here on earth. What a joy to believe that the entire Way to Heaven is Heaven!

II. Heaven CCC 1023-1029

1023 Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face:⁵⁹⁶

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints . . . and other faithful who died after receiving

Christ's holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, . . . or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death, . . .) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment - and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven - have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.⁵⁹⁷

1024 This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called "heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

1025 To live in heaven is "to be with Christ." the elect live "in Christ,"⁵⁹⁸ but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name.⁵⁹⁹

For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the kingdom.⁶⁰⁰

1026 By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has "opened" heaven to us. the life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

1027 This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."⁶⁰¹

1028 Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. the Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory "the beatific vision":

How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ your Lord and God, . . . to delight in the joy of immortality in the Kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God's friends.⁶⁰²

1029 In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him "they shall reign for ever and ever."⁶⁰³

Augustine: Let the gospel tell us: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* You will come to the fountain, with whose dew you have already been sprinkled. Instead of the ray of light which was sent through slanting and winding ways into the heart of your darkness, you will see the light itself in all its purity and brightness.

“How great that felicity will be, where there will be no evil, where no good thing will be lacking, and where we shall be free to give ourselves up to the praise of God, Who will be all in all.

Are there different levels of heaven?

Dante.... degrees is the better term. Degrees of perfection. The degree of perfection of the beatific vision granted to the just is proportioned to each one's merits.

COUNCIL OF FLORENCE (1499) declared the souls of the perfectly just clearly behold the Triune and One God as he is, but corresponding to the difference of their merits, the one more perfectly than the other. The Council of Trent defined that the justified person merits an increase of the heavenly glory by good works.

To say that the redeemed will attain perfection is not the same as saying that they will attain equality.

The depth of the love we have at the moment of death is the depth at which we shall be glorified. The level of spiritual maturity we have attained by grace at the moment of death is the level at which we shall be perfected through our life in purgatory, the level at which we shall spend eternity. Our love for God and for those arrived as will be perfected but will not be increased.

Consider this analogy. If we fill both a fifty-gallon drum and a thimble with water, one container is just as full as the other. But their capacity is greatly different.

This image illustrates what the Church teaches: In the lives of the redeemed in heaven there will be varying “degrees of blessedness.” **Different persons will have different capacities for union with God**, based on the sanctity each has achieved by grace in this life. We all will be filled to perfection, though not all of us to the same capacity.

Even so, there will of course be no envy in heaven. Those of us who will be like thimbles will forever rejoice in the saints who will be like water towers.

Scripture gives us a sense in which reward in heaven is proportional. There is great reward and apparently not so great reward there is a profit reward and a righteous man's reward which apparently are greater in some way. There are also warnings against failing to gain or lose reward. Not everyone gets the same reward.

The Bible uses the idea of heavenly award to motivate us. There is nothing strange or wrong in that. Jesus spoke many times about having treasure in heaven, and Jesus said this with the sense that not everyone will have the same treasure in heaven. These are things we can do now to build or increase our treasure in heaven

It's hard even impossible to imagine that heaven will be a competition between those who have lots of rewards and those who don't.

Jesus assured us, “In my Father’s house there are many rooms” (Jn 14:2). St. Augustine taught that the reference to “rooms” or “mansions” refers to differing degrees of rewards in heaven, and St. Thomas Aquinas concurred.

Augustine: But why have we this that follows, In my Father's house are many mansions, but that they were also in [fear](#) about themselves? And therein they might have heard the words, Let not your heart be troubled. For, was there any of them that could be free from [fear](#), when Peter, the most confident and forward of them all, was told, The cock shall not crow till you have denied me thrice? Considering themselves, therefore, beginning with Peter, as destined to perish, they had [cause](#) to be troubled: but when they now hear, In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you, they are revived from their trouble, made certain and confident that after all the perils of [temptations](#) they shall dwell with Christ in the presence of [God](#). For, albeit one is stronger than another, one wiser than another, one more righteous than another, in the Father's house there are many mansions; none of them shall remain outside that house, where every one, according to his deserts, is to receive a mansion. All alike have that penny, which the householder orders to be given to all that have wrought in the vineyard, making no distinction therein between those who have labored less and those who have labored more: [Matthew 20:9](#) by which penny, of course, is signified [eternal](#) life, whereto no one any longer lives to a different length than others, since in [eternity](#) life has no diversity in its measure. **But the many mansions point to the different grades of merit in that one [eternal](#) life. For there is one [glory](#) of the sun, another [glory](#) of the moon, and another [glory](#) of the stars: for one star differs from another star in [glory](#); and so also the resurrection of the dead. The [saints](#), like the stars in the sky, obtain in the kingdom different mansions of diverse degrees of brightness; but on account of that one penny**

no one is cut off from the kingdom; and God will be all in all in such a way, that, as God is [love](#), [1 John 4:8](#) [love](#) will bring it about that what is possessed by each will be common to all. For in this way every one really possesses it, when he loves to see in another what he has not himself. There will not, therefore, be any envying amid this diversity of brightness, since in all of them will be reigning the unity of [love](#).

THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas: 853 He says, **in my Father's house are many rooms**. The house of any one is where he dwells, and so the house of God is where God dwells. Now God dwells in his saints: "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us" (Jer 14:9). In some of them he dwells by faith: "I will live in them and move among them" (2 Cor 6:16); while in others he dwells by perfect happiness: "that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:28). Accordingly, God has two houses. One is the Church militant, that is, the society of those who believe: "that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim 3:15). God dwells in this house by faith. "The dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them" (Rev 21:3). The other is the Church triumphant, that is, the society of the saints in the glory of the Father: "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, thy holy temple" (Ps 65:4).

In this house, then, that is, in glory, which is God, are many rooms, that is, various participations in happiness. **This is because one who knows more will have a greater place. Therefore, the different rooms are the various participations in the knowledge and enjoyment of God.**

But in a qualified sense, that is, considering certain conditions of time, of nature and of grace, one person can be happier than another depending on the possession of this good and the capacity of each. **The greater the capacity a person has for this good, the more he shares in it, I mean he participates in it more the better disposed and prepared he is to enjoy it.** Now one is disposed for this good in two ways. Happiness consists in two things. The first is the vision of God; and one is disposed for this by purity. And so the more one has a heart which is raised above earthly matters, the more he will see God, and the more perfectly. Secondly, happiness consists in the delight of enjoying [God], and one is disposed for this by love. Thus, one who has a more burning love for God will find more delight in the enjoyment of God. We read about the first in Matthew (5:8): "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see." [\[2\]](#)

1855 Another question arises from what Matthew (20:10) says, that every laborer received one denarius. This denarius is nothing but a room in the house of the Father. Therefore,

there are not many rooms. I answer that the reward of eternal life is both one and many. It is many based on the various capacities of those who share in it, and from this point of view there are different rooms in the Father's house.

Yet this reward is one, and this for three reasons. **It is like a spring of water, available to all to take as much as they wish. Then, one who has a larger cup will receive more, and one who has a smaller cup will receive less. Therefore, there is one fountain, considering it in itself, but every one does not receive the same portion. This is the opinion of Gregory, in his *Morals* XXII. [3] Secondly, this reward is one, according to Augustine, because it is an eternal portion: each one will have an eternal happiness, for the just will go into eternal life; but there are differences in capacity. [4] Thirdly, this reward is one because of charity, which unites everything, and makes the joy of each the joy of the rest, and conversely: "Rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom 12:15).**

The "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" of the Second Vatican Council says this of the life of the redeemed in heaven: "All of us ... **in varying degrees and in different ways**, share in the same charity towards God and our neighbors, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God" (sec. 49, emphasis added).

In 1979 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a "Letter on Eschatology." It stated clearly that "**our charity on earth will be the measure of our sharing in God's glory in heaven**"

True love always desires the deepest possible union appropriate to the relationship with the beloved. If we truly love God our Father, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit our Lifegiver, we want to share in their life to the fullest possible extent. **So you can see why the Church continually urges us to grow in sanctity.**

Augustine: *You he crowns with compassion and mercy; and even if your merits have preceded you, God says to you, "Have a good look at your merits, sort them out carefully, and you will see that they are my gifts" ... When you depart from here you will receive according to what you deserve, and you will rise again to receive what you have achieved. Then God will set the crown, not so much on your merits as on his gifts. Whatever he has given you, if you have kept and preserved it, he will recognize.*

"He crowns His own gifts, not thy merits. ...God crowns in us the gifts of His own mercy ..."

MERIT

The Church does not teach that we can earn our place before God. Everything we receive from him is due to his grace.

When we first come to God and are justified, it is entirely by his grace, for “none of those things that precede justification, whether faith or works, merit the grace of justification” (Trent, Decree on Justification 8).

After our initial justification, God’s grace leads us to do good works (Eph. 2:10) and he rewards these (Rom. 2:6–7), but still, “with regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator” (CCC 2007).

In terms of this “strict right,” Benedict XVI wrote: “We cannot—to use the classical expression—‘merit’ heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something ‘merited,’ but always a gift” (Spe Salvi 35).

On the other hand, Scripture does indicate that we will receive rewards, that our actions can lay up “treasures in heaven,” and that God will reward patience in good work with glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life (see Day 312). **There is a sense, therefore, in which each of these things is understood in Scripture as a reward for what we have done by God’s grace. However, good works receive a reward (i.e., become meritorious) not because we earn our place before God, but because they are done by his grace and because he freely promised to reward them.**

“According to the Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened. When Catholics affirm the ‘meritorious’ character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace” (JD 38).

That [Christian](#) grace can be merited either by the observance of the Jewish law or by mere natural works (see [Grace](#)), this alone is foreign to the [Bible](#). On the other hand, eternal reward is promised in the [Bible](#) to those supernatural works which are performed in the state of grace, and that because they are meritorious (cf. Matt., xxv, 34 sqq.; Rom., ii, 6 sqq.; II Cor., v, 10).

c) But is not this continual acting “with one eye on heaven”, the meanest “mercenary spirit” and greed which necessarily vitiates to the core all moral action? Can there be any question of morality, if it is only the desire for eternal bliss or simply the fear of hell that determines one to do good and avoid evil? Such a disposition is certainly far from being the ideal of [Catholic](#) morality. On the contrary, the [Church](#) proclaims to all her children that pure love of [God](#) is the first and supreme commandment (cf. Mark, xii, 30). It is our highest ideal to act out of love. For he who truly loves [God](#) would keep His commandments, even though there were no eternal reward in the next life. Nevertheless, the desire for heaven is a necessary and natural consequence of the perfect love of [God](#); for heaven is only the perfect possession of [God](#) by love. As a true friend desires to see his friend without thereby sinking into egotism so does the loving soul ardently desire the [Beatific Vision](#), not from a craving for reward, but out of pure love. It is unfortunately too true that only the best type of Christians, and especially the great saints of the [Church](#), reach this high standard of morality in everyday life. The great majority of ordinary Christians must be deterred from sin principally by the fear of hell and spurred on to good works by the thought of an eternal reward, before they attain perfect love. But, even for those souls who love [God](#), there are times of grave temptation when only the thought of heaven and hell keeps them from falling. Such a disposition, be it habitual or only transitory, is morally less perfect, but it is not immoral. As, according to Christ’s doctrine and that of St. Paul (see above), it is legitimate to hope for a heavenly reward, so, according to the same doctrine of Christ (cf. Matt., x, 28), the fear of hell is a motive of moral action, a “grace of [God](#) and an impulse of the [Holy Ghost](#)” ([Council of Trent](#), Sess. XIV, cap. iv, in Denzinger, n. 898).

In accord with the [Bible](#) the [Church](#) teaches that the external work has a moral value only when and in so far as it proceeds from a right interior disposition and intention (cf. Matt., vi, 1 sqq.; Mark, xii, 41 sqq.; I Cor., x, 31, etc.). As the body receives its life from the soul, so must external actions be penetrated and vivified by holiness of intention. In a beautiful play on words St. Augustine says (Serm. iii, n. xi): Bonos mores faciunt boni amores. Hence the [Church](#) urges her children to forming each morning the “good intention”, that they may thereby sanctify the whole day and make even the indifferent actions of their exterior life serve for the glory of [God](#); “all for the greater glory of [God](#)“, is the constant prayer of the faithful [Catholic](#). Not only does the moral teaching of the [Catholic Church](#) attribute no moral value whatever to the mere external performance of good works without a corresponding good intention, but it detests such performance as hypocrisy and pretense. On the other hand, our good intention, provided it be genuine and deep-rooted, naturally spurs us on to external works, and without these works it would be reduced to a mere semblance of life.

[God](#) crowns thy merits, not as thine earnings, but as His gifts. Nothing was more strongly and frequently inculcated by the [Council of Trent](#) than the proposition that the faithful owe their entire capability of meriting and all their good works solely to the infinite merits of the Redeemer [Jesus Christ](#)). The [Catholic](#) certainly must rely on the merits of Christ, and, far from boasting of his own self-righteousness, he must acknowledge in all humility that even his merits, acquired with the help of grace, are full of imperfections, and that his justification is uncertain (see [Grace](#)).

In order to be meritorious a work must be morally good, morally free, done with the assistance of actual grace, and inspired by a supernatural motive. St. Paul teaches that “whatsoever good thing [bonum] any man shall do, the same shall he receive from the Lord, whether he be bond, or free” (Eph. vi, 8). The necessity of the third condition, i.e., of the influence of actual grace, is clear from the fact that every act meriting heaven must evidently be super-natural just as heaven itself is supernatural, and that consequently it cannot be performed without the help of prevenient and assisting grace, which is necessary even for the just. The strictly supernatural destiny of the [Beatific Vision](#), for which the [Christian](#) must strive, necessitates ways and means which lie altogether beyond what is purely natural (see [Grace](#)).

THE OBJECTS OF MERIT.—Merit in the strict sense (meritum de condigno) gives a right to a threefold reward: increase of sanctifying grace, heavenly glory and the increase thereof;

As the third object of merit the council mentions the “increase of glory” (glorice augmentum) which evidently must correspond to the increase of grace, as this corresponds to the accumulation of good works. At the Last Day, when Christ will come with his angels to judge the world, “He will render to every man according to his works [secundum opera eius]” (Matt., xvi, 27; cf. Rom., ii, 6). And St. Paul repeats the same (I Cor., iii, 8): “Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor [secundum suum laborem]”. This explains the inequality that exists between the glory of the different saints.

Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifest in Christ. Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ.

Because heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme definitive happiness which is really envy which is a deadly sin is necessarily excluded despite any differing degrees of enjoyment of heaven among the faithful. There is no sin in heaven and God perfectly fulfills each one of us. The church

provides a few additional insights on how we will enjoy heaven. For example in heaven there will be not the least pain or sadness for every aspiration of nature must be fulfilled finally realized. The will of the blessed is in perfect harmony with the divine will they feel displeasure at the sign of man but without experiencing any real pain **Peter Kreft explains how the faithful joy in heaven will not be diminished by knowing that others even loved ones are in hell. God and the faithful will love the damn but the faithful will love like God a love that is not passive to or dependent upon events.**

This love does not demand to be reciprocated at the price of our own happiness anymore than the light demands to be reflected by a mirror at the price of its own illumination. Light is still light whether it is reflected back by a polished mirror or absorbed into an opaque object. God's joy is like that. It does not depend on us, nor does his knowledge of our lapses diminish it. And our joy will not be diminished by what we know about the damned. How could hell eternally blackmail heaven.

In addition, every person in heaven will have a glorified body with four characteristics splendor whereby our bodies will be beautiful to behold agility in which we will be able to move simply by willing it in our mind subtlety in which our souls will be literally subordinate to our souls which could include our ability to pass through other physical entities as Christ passed through locked doors after his resurrection and impassability whereby we will not suffer at all.

ISSUE: WHAT IS HEAVEN? WHERE IS IT?

Response: Heaven is “a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit.” [\[1\]](#) It is the fulfillment of God’s desire to be one with each man as God is one with Himself in the Trinity (cf. Jn. 17:20-24).

The Church does not identify a specific place for heaven, such as in the clouds, but does affirm that heaven is union with God, face to face, without the mediation of any creature (cf. Catechism, nos. 1023-29).

Discussion: Because of our limited understanding, no amount of description will provide a satisfying understanding of the sublime reality of heaven. Historically, various theologians have described heaven as both a place and a state of being. However, no one can capture the reality and essence of heaven until he has experienced it personally. As St. Paul wrote, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Time and space are creatures. As noted in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” There was a moment at which time began. This was an act of

creation by God, who is not bound by time. At that moment, God also created space, namely the heavens and the earth. Though they are two separate creatures, time and space complement one another. Space was created within time, and creatures of space (eg., sun, moon, and stars) provide a telling of time.

When considering the topic of heaven, it is important to remember that during our earthly lives we experience time and space simultaneously. However, as separate and distinct created realities, they need not exist together.

God created man within the limits of time and space. This has its benefits. When we sin, we have time to repent and turn to God for mercy. Because of time, we have opportunity to change our ways. Time and space also limit us. We depend on the experiences of time and space to grow in knowledge and understanding. We do not simply know things, we learn them by experiences with other creatures. When we express our knowledge and thoughts, we do so according to the limits of our experiences.

SAY WHAT?

Language is the most powerful symbol man uses to express himself. By use of language, other signs and symbols are explained. Yet language falls short of expressing realities we do not fully understand. Everyone experiences this. On one occasion or another, we grapple with the right words to use when describing an experience or idea. We simply do not know what to say.

Heaven is one of those realities we do not fully understand. It is not limited to time and space as we are. As a result, none of our experiences with other creatures on earth can fully reveal the nature of heaven. Nor can our languages or imaginations describe it perfectly (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9).

When describing heaven, man traditionally has taken one of two approaches. Either he describes heaven as a state of being or as a place. It seems that each approach depends on whether the person starts with the characteristics of God or the characteristics of man.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

God is eternal and omnipresent. He is not bound by time or space. He existed before their creation. Because heaven existed as the dwelling of God before time, it must be eternal as well. This leaves us with two possibilities. If we consider heaven as a created space, it must be a space “eternally created” by the very presence of God. This concept of “eternal creation” makes no sense to our human understanding. [2] If heaven is not a creature, then it is simply God’s eternal presence. In either case, heaven would be both eternal and omnipresent, bound by neither time nor space. If heaven is omnipresent, can we really call

it a place? With this line of reasoning, it is easy to see that heaven is far different from any place comprehensible to man on earth.

Explaining heaven as a state of being eliminates the confusion between created space bound by time and created space apart from time. Such an explanation appeals to the characteristics of God, particularly His eternal and omnipresent nature. As a state of being and not a place per se, our inheritance of heaven is understood as the fullness of communion with God. Traditionally, this is known as the beatific vision, the seeing of God.

However, heaven must contain space, because it contains the glorified body of Christ (cf. Mk. 16:19; Lk. 24:51), as well as the bodies of Enoch (cf. Gen. 5:24), Moses (cf. Jude 9), Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 2:9-12), and the Blessed Virgin Mary (cf. Rev. 12:1). At the end of time, it will contain the glorified bodies of all the saints (cf. Catechism, nos. 988-1019). However, its reality is not a place bound by time and space as we know it, and this is incomprehensible to us. Its spatial reality is a reality of God's glory, not a reality of the created world.

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 21 July 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. When the form of this world has passed away, those who have welcomed God into their lives and have sincerely opened themselves to his love, at least at the moment of death, will enjoy that fullness of communion with God which is the goal of human life.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “this perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity — this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed — is called ‘heaven’. **Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness**” (n. 1024).

Today we will try to understand the biblical meaning of “heaven”, in order to have a better understanding of the reality to which this expression refers.

2. In biblical language “heaven”, when it is joined to the “earth”, indicates part of the universe. Scripture says about creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gn 1:1*).

Metaphorically speaking, heaven is understood as the dwelling-place of God, who is thus distinguished from human beings (cf. *Ps* 104:2f.; 115:16; *Is* 66:1). He sees and judges from the heights of heaven (cf. *Ps* 113:4-9) and comes down when he is called upon (cf. *Ps* 18:9, 10; 144:5). However the biblical metaphor makes it clear that God does not identify himself with heaven, nor can he be contained in it (cf. *1 Kgs* 8:27); and this is true, even though in some passages of the First Book of the Maccabees “Heaven” is simply one of God's names (*1 Mc* 3:18, 19, 50, 60; 4:24, 55).

The depiction of heaven as the transcendent dwelling-place of the living God is joined with that of the place to which believers, through grace, can also ascend, as we see in the Old Testament accounts of Enoch (cf. *Gn* 5:24) and Elijah (cf. *2 Kgs* 2:11). Thus heaven becomes an image of life in God. In this sense Jesus speaks of a “reward in heaven” (*Mt* 5:12) and urges people to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (*ibid.*, 6:20; cf. 19:21).

3. The New Testament amplifies the idea of heaven in relation to the mystery of Christ. To show that the Redeemer's sacrifice acquires perfect and definitive value, the Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus “passed through the heavens” (*Heb* 4:14), and “entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself” (*ibid.*, 9:24). Since believers are loved in a special way by the Father, they are raised with Christ and made citizens of heaven. It is worthwhile listening to what the Apostle Paul tells us about this in a very powerful text: “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (*Eph* 2:4-7). The fatherhood of God, who is rich in mercy, is experienced by creatures through the love of God's crucified and risen Son, who sits in heaven on the right hand of the Father as Lord.

4. After the course of our earthly life, participation in complete intimacy with the Father thus comes through our insertion into Christ's paschal mystery. St Paul emphasizes our meeting with Christ in heaven at the end of time with a vivid spatial image: “Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (*1 Thes* 4:17-18).

In the context of Revelation, we know that the “heaven” or “happiness” in which we will find ourselves is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit.

It is always necessary to maintain a certain restraint in describing these “ultimate realities” since their depiction is always unsatisfactory. Today, personalist language is better suited to describing the state of happiness and peace we will enjoy in our definitive communion with God.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sums up the Church's teaching on this truth: “By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has ‘opened’ heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. **Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ**” (n. 1026).

5. This final state, however, can be anticipated in some way today in sacramental life, whose centre is the Eucharist, and in the gift of self through fraternal charity. **If we are able to enjoy properly the good things that the Lord showers upon us every day, we will already have begun to experience that joy and peace which one day will be completely ours. We know that on this earth everything is subject to limits, but the thought of the “ultimate” realities helps us to live better the “penultimate” realities.** We know that as we pass through this world we are called to seek “the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (*Col 3:1*), in order to be with him in the eschatological fulfilment, when the Spirit will fully reconcile with the Father “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (*Col 1:20*).

As St. Augustine wrote, “You made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” [5] Heaven fulfills the desire of our hearts for God. Our lives on earth must be directed to seeking that perfect union with God that He meant for us from the beginning. When we reach that heavenly beatitude, our hearts will be filled with an intense love and joy that can only be described as God Himself

Our participation in the liturgies and sacraments of the Church are nothing less than our participation in the communion of saints. As the saints and angels worship before God in heaven, so on earth we participate in their glorious praise of His Name. The glory given the saints in heaven is our hope as we yearn for God during our earthly exile. God has given us on earth a glimpse of heavenly realities that we may not lose heart. Let us find in our marriages, families, and daily work the encouragement to keep our focus on God, until that day when we shall see Him face to face.

Biblical Verses Concerning Reward in Heaven

Matthew 19:29 ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold,^[a] and will inherit eternal life.

Matthew 25:34 ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

Matthew 10:41 ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous;

Matthew 18:4 ⁴Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 7:21 ²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven

Matthew 6:19-20 ¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[a] consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust^[b] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

1 Cor. 2:9 ⁹But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him"—

2 Cor. 9:6 ⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Gal. 6:7-8 ⁷Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

John 14:2 ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?^[a]

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