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AFTER DEATH

WHAT?

HEAVEN, PURGATORY, HELL

(With Discussion Club Outline)



By

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AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

By REV. GERALD C. TREACY, S.J.

HEAVEN

HEAVEN, Hell and Purgatory make up the Other World. They are real. An infallible Church teaches us this. We Catholics for that reason believe it. We cannot be Catholics and believe otherwise. Sometimes we hear a person say: "God is too merciful. There cannot be a Hell." But no one ever says: "God is too just. There cannot be a Heaven. No one could possibly deserve it." Yet it is as reasonable to say there cannot be a Heaven as that there cannot be a Hell. It is unreasonable to make either statement for God has assured us that there is everlasting happiness for those who die in His friendship, and everlasting suffering for those who die at enmity with Him. We may not like the idea. But that has nothing to do with the fact that the Other World has two eternal divisions, and one temporary that will cease when time ceases. God has said so, His Church repeats His statement and calls it a dogma of Faith, and we either accept these facts or cease to be Catholics.

When we speak about Heaven we mean a state and a place; the state of eternal blessedness and the place where God dwells with His angels and His saints. For everyone who reaches Heaven is a saint.

In Holy Scripture our Lord speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven. Time and time again He tells us what it is like. He urges His followers to keep it in mind when difficulties and disappointments come into their lives. He makes it clear that there is the abiding city as Saint Paul called it, and everything in this life leads thereto. Any careful reader of the Gospel narrative, no matter what his belief, will conclude that there is a sequel to the Kingdom

Christ preached upon earth, and that is His Kingdom in Heaven.

Not only Catholics but all sensible people who believe in the immortality of the soul believe in Heaven. They believe in it because it is reasonable to believe in it. They know for example that God made all things for His honor and glory. Every creature is to contribute to that honor and glory by reflecting God's perfections as far as each creature is capable of doing so. Man is capable of glorifying God in a most perfect manner by knowing, loving, and imitating God's infinite perfections. He is created for this. To know and love God always is the greatest thing that the human mind can do. Moreover this is its supreme happiness. Man is created for this eternal happiness. And that is what Heaven means.

Heaven moreover is the reward of a good life on earth. Our Lord says that it is. One day in the long ago He was speaking on charity, and He told His listeners that they must show practical love for their fellow-men not because they were men but because they were children of God. For when you help a man who is down because he is a man you are a humanitarian, but when you help a man because he is a brother of Christ and a son of the Eternal Father you are charitable. In that instance you really help Christ, strange as it may seem. At the end of the world, Christ said, many people will be puzzled by this for they will ask: "Lord when did we see You hungry, and thirsty, sick and in prison?" And they will get for their answer: "You did not see Me in need of help but you did see men in need and you helped them for My sake; so your reward will be everlasting." Heaven is the reward for good done on earth according to Christ's teaching. As we are His creatures and have nothing but what

He gave us we have no claim on Heaven. But in His infinite love and mercy He gives us a claim. This is what He says and so we believe Him whose Word cannot fail.

WHERE IS HEAVEN?

There are many opinions to answer this question yet the truest answer is that we do not know where Heaven is. Holy Scripture tells us little about it, our Lord never said where it was, and the Church has given no decision in the matter. The chief thing to remember is that Heaven is happiness, a condition of soul, and its location could be anywhere God chose. God being everywhere is present to all souls. He is the object of the contemplation of the souls now in Heaven and the possession of their love. They are without their bodies. After the General Judgment, souls and bodies will be united and so the Blessed will be with God in some place.

Saint John wrote of Heaven in this way: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were gone, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His people, and God Himself with them shall be their God'" (Apoc. 21, 1-3). The passing of the Blessed from their present state of happiness to perfect Glory will begin on the Last Day. After the body has received its share of eternal reward the whole man will be completely happy. It would seem from Saint John's vision that the earth will be the place where the Church Triumphant will reign. It will be a "new earth." It will be the place where those enjoying the

Beatific Vision will dwell. Our present earth will be renewed, purified, not destroyed by fire. The Fathers of the Church refer to Holy Scripture in supporting their belief in the renewal of this world.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says that God will “remove the heavens not to destroy them but to restore them in more beautiful form.” Saint Gregory Nazianzen when preaching on the occasion of his brother’s death declared: “I await the archangel’s call, the last trumpet blast, the transformation of heaven and earth, the dissolution of the elements and the renewal of the whole world.” The transformation will take place by means of fire. With fire the Lord will come to judge the world; “Behold the Lord will come with fire” (Isaias 66, 15). “His throne like flames of fire” (Daniel 7, 9). “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of his power in a flame of fire” (2 Thess. 1, 7). “The day of the Lord shall declare it because it shall be revealed in fire” (1 Cor. 3, 13). In regard to the transformation of the world Saint Peter in his second letter is quite clear.

He was warning his followers against “deceitful scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying: ‘Where is His promise of His coming? For since the time that the fathers slept, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.’” Heretics who denied the second coming of Christ because nature remained unchanging were reminded by Saint Peter of the deluge in the time of Noe: “This they are wilfully ignorant of, that the heavens were before, and the earth out of water and through water, consisting by the word of God whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water perished.” The outward form of the earth was destroyed at the Deluge. So will the fire at the end of the world

change its present condition and not destroy it utterly: "But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of the ungodly men." And continuing: "But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat and the earth and the works which are in it shall be burned up. Seeing then all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of people ought you to be in holy conversation and godliness? Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of the Lord by which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with the burning heat? But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to His promise in which justice dwelleth" (2 Peter 3, 10-13).

This is the Apostle's account of the coming of the Lord by fire. As to the meaning of "heaven" in this passage commentators are divided. Saint Ambrose and Saint Jerome think that all the stars will be affected by the general catastrophe but Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas limit it to our planet. Of course the "elements" mentioned by Saint Peter are not those which modern chemistry knows by that name, but those known to the ancients namely air, fire, earth, water. Air is mentioned as the heavens, fire as the consuming agent, so earth and water are the "elements." When the fire of the Last Day comes our earth will be a shapeless, glowing mass, out of which God will call forth the new heaven and the new earth.

It is of interest to remember that the ancient pagan nations believed that the world would be renewed by fire. This belief was undoubtedly a survival of primitive revelation which filtered into paganism. The great last fire is

deemed necessary before the coming of the Golden Age and is connected with the advent of the Great King. Legends on this point are found among the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, Chinese, Greeks and Romans.

Though varying greatly they bear a marked resemblance to Christian tradition. The great fire is sometimes described as recurring at the end of each world-epoch, but all agree in connecting it with the General Judgment which is to mark the victory of good gods over evil spirits. The Sibylline Books, a collection of legends and prophecies, contain the story of the destruction and renewal of the world. The same idea is found in the Orphic poems. The Greek sages too, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates, as well as the Stoics, discussed the future fire when speculating about the end of the world.

What will the new earth be like when this world ends? We do not know. It is to be the home of the Blessed and surely for that reason exceedingly beautiful. As the body will share in the glory of the soul so will this earth partake in the glory of the risen body. It will be spiritualized and refined. The vision of Isaias was: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days" (Isaias, 30, 26). And Saint John speaking of the "new heaven and the new earth" declared: "And there came one of the seven angels . . . And he took me up in spirit to a great and high mountain and he showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. Having the glory of God, and the light thereof was like to a precious stone, as to the jasper stone, even as crystal. . . . And the city hath no need of the sun nor of the moon to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it and

the Lamb is the lamp thereof. And the nations shall walk in the light of it. . . . There shall not enter into it anything defiled or that worketh abomination or maketh a lie but they that are written in the book of life of the Lamb" (Apoc. 21, 10-27).

THE BEATIFIC VISION

When Saint Paul wished to make clear the happiness of Heaven he spoke about seeing God "face to face." "Now we see in a mirror obscurely but then (we shall see) face to face. Now I know in part, then shall I know fully even as I have been fully known (by God)" (1 Cor. 13, 12). This is the happiness of Heaven. It is called the Beatific Vision. God penetrates the soul and the soul sees God and is happy eternally. Here in this life we get our knowledge of God indirectly through creatures. By reason we rise from the creature to the Creator. In Heaven, however, we shall see God directly. There will be no creature between God and the soul for by immediate intuition the soul will see God. This is a dogma of our Faith defined by Pope Benedict the Twelfth:

"We define that the souls of all the saints in Heaven have seen and do see the Divine Essence by direct intuition and face to face in such wise that nothing created intervenes as an object of Vision, but the Divine Essence presents itself to their immediate gaze, unveiled, clearly, and openly; moreover that in this vision and this enjoyment they are truly blessed and possess eternal life and eternal rest."

It is of Faith also that the Beatific Vision is supernatural and transcends the powers of created natures. It is not difficult to understand why this should be if we remember the supernatural character of sanctifying grace.

This grace we know is the preparation for the vision of God. If the preparation for that vision is supernatural, it is clear that the vision itself must be supernatural.

The immediate knowledge of God is a free gift of Divine bounty. Now to see God in this way the soul needs some permanent supernatural strength. This is called the "light of glory." It is called the light of glory for it enables the blessed to see God with their intellects just as light here on earth enables our eyes to see objects. Through the light of glory the blessed see God as He is, and then they see everything else that interests them. Theologians call God the primary object of the Beatific Vision and everything else secondary objects. The Council of Vienne in 1311 defined the light of glory.

God gives Himself entirely to the blessed. As Saint Thomas explains it: "*Electi Dominum vident totum sed not totaliter.*" The soul is finite. In seeing God it possesses an infinite good, but in a finite manner and proportionate to its merits. No two souls in Heaven see God in the same way. The Blessed Mother for example enjoys the sight of God in a much higher way than the last soul entering there having received the grace of final repentance after a long life of sin. Yet both are supremely happy.

God cannot be *comprehended* by a finite mind, but God can be *reached* by a finite mind. As Saint Thomas says:

"Comprehension is twofold; in one sense it is taken strictly and properly as when a being is entirely included in the one that comprehends it. In this sense God cannot be comprehended by any created intellect, whether angelic or human, for the simple reason that an infinite being cannot be comprised in a finite one. In another sense comprehension is taken more largely and it means that the object aimed at is actually reached or attained. In this sense God

is comprehended by the Blessed and comprehension becomes for them the full realization of their hopes" (The Summa Theologica, Part 1, Question 12, Article 7). The Beatific Vision is a mystery, that is it transcends reason, and if the Church did not tell us about it we would not know it of ourselves. This Vision of God is Heaven. How to understand this! In "The City of God" Saint Augustine reminds us that "we are incapable of speaking in a befitting manner of this vision, yet we cannot be altogether silent about it." It means seeing God's infinite perfections. The Blessed through this vision see in God all the mysteries of their Faith, the wonders of creation and all the events of the human race from its beginning to its end. This knowledge Saint Thomas holds will be more profound than any knowledge acquired by the most learned men upon earth. This knowledge means knowing God not only in Himself but in relation to all existing and possible creatures. For God is the cause of His creatures in three ways. He is their Exemplar or the model according to which they are made, He is their Maker giving them everything both in nature and in grace, and He is their End towards which they all tend. In all these relations the Blessed understand God for in understanding the Divine Essence they understand the Divine Ideas. In Heaven the souls of the Blessed increase their admiration, love and praise in proportion to the increase of their knowledge. That is, the external glory of God goes on apace through eternity.

Theologians in speaking of the happiness of Heaven mention the "*dotes beatorum*," the dowry of the Blessed. By this is meant the supernatural endowments of the soul in the beatific state. Remembering the allegorical meaning of the mystic marriage of the soul with Christ it is not

difficult to understand the dowry of the Blessed. A dowry is a gift that precedes marriage. So the dowry given by Christ to His mystic spouse is a habit which precedes the Beatific Vision and makes it more enjoyable. This dowry consists of gifts of soul and body. The dowry of the soul consists of the three gifts of contemplation, possession and enjoyment. Contemplation corresponds to faith, possession to hope, enjoyment to charity. All blend in the light of glory which banishes the darkness of Faith, makes sure of the possession of God and guarantees the enjoyment of His love. The Latin words used to name these gifts are "*visio*," "*comprehensio*," "*fruitio*."

The bodily gifts that belong to the dowry of the Blessed are impassibility, brightness, agility and subtlety. Discomfort, pain and death are banned by the gift of impassibility. "This mortal body," says Saint Paul, "must needs put on incorruption" (1 Cor. 15, 53). And Saint John assures us: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall mourning nor crying nor pain be any more, because the first things are passed away" (Apoc. 21, 4).

The gift of brightness as our Lord tells us will make the Blessed "shine as the sun." And Saint Paul speaks of this gift in telling us that God, our Saviour, will "transform the body of our lowliness, that it may be one with the body of His glory, by the force of that power whereby He is able to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3, 21). And in his first letter to the Corinthians he says: "The glory of the heavenly is different from that of the earthly. There is the glory of the sun and the glory of the moon and the glory of the stars; for star differeth from star in glory. And so it is with the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15, 40-42). And Saint Thomas declares that "the glory of

the soul shall be perceptible in the glorified body, as the color of a body enclosed in a glass receptacle is visible through the glass." (Supplement of the Summa, Question 82, Article 1, ad 5.)

The Body of our Lord after His resurrection was not bound by space. This gift which the bodies of the Blessed will enjoy is called agility, enabling them to move from place to place speedily and with ease. Subtility which is the last bodily gift belonging to the soul's dowry, enables the body to enjoy the higher life of the soul. For the soul is so filled with grace that it raises the body to its own level. The body becomes completely subject to the soul, conflict is at an end and the body may really be said to be almost spiritualized.

FREEDOM FROM SIN

Another source of Heaven's happiness is freedom from sin. The Blessed not only do not sin but they cannot. And strange as it may seem this grace is compatible with perfect liberty. For liberty means freedom to do what is befitting the nature of the doer. To be free to do evil here on earth is only noteworthy because the soul is at the same time free to avoid evil. As sin is an evil it is against the soul's best interests. But nothing in Heaven can be against the soul's best interests. So the soul cannot sin in Heaven. Moreover sin is the abuse of liberty. It is a defect, an imperfection. Now divine grace improves nature to the extent of removing any imperfections. So the presence of grace in the souls of the Elect makes sin impossible. Their souls are confirmed in grace.

Grace as we know affects the intellect and the will. It enlightens the intellect. That is it makes it understand things so well that error is impossible for the soul in

Heaven. Sin of course is error. It is mixing things up. It is mistaking black for white, darkness for light. But the soul confirmed in grace cannot make such a mistake. It cannot say of evil: "This is good." It can do this in mortal life but not in life immortal. In fact it always does this on earth. No soul grasps after evil because it is evil. It thinks it sees some good in it. And it rushes for the good. But in Heaven this cannot be so. For the soul is all-knowing there. It has Truth as it has God, and all little truths fit in with the Big Truth. So it really knows, and the soul that really knows cannot sin.

The True and the Good satisfy the intellect and the will. For these faculties of the soul were made to be so satisfied. Now in Heaven God is Truth and Good and the soul rests in God. Sin then is impossible for it. It is so truly free that it cannot choose evil.

EVERLASTING HAPPINESS

"The just shall go into everlasting bliss" (Matthew 25, 46), said our Lord making it very clear that the happiness of Heaven is everlasting. Moreover the Church has repeatedly defined it, and Catholics profess this belief every time they say the Apostles' Creed. As a plain matter of common sense it is difficult to imagine a temporary Heaven, for if the souls in Heaven knew that their bliss would end, this knowledge alone would prevent their happiness from being perfect. Inject the temporal or temporary and you destroy the idea of complete happiness. The Psalmist exclaims: "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house O Lord; they shall praise Thee forever and ever" (Psalm 83, 5). And the author of the Book of Wisdom declares: "The Just shall live for evermore: and their reward is with the Lord" (Wisdom 5, 16).

The eternity of Heaven is an article of Faith defined by Pope Benedict the Twelfth, in 1336. He was speaking of the Vision of God in the Bull "Benedictus:"

"This same vision and fruition . . . continues and will continue till the final judgment, and thenceforward forever."

Holy Scripture again and again uses figurative language of rare beauty to express the eternity of Heaven. For Heaven is compared to "a treasure which fails not, which no thief approaches, nor moth corrupts." It is a series of "everlasting dwellings." It is "a never fading crown of glory," an "everlasting kingdom," "eternal life." The Fathers of the Church teach the doctrine of everlasting glory. Saint Augustine appositely remarks that Heaven must be everlasting as no happiness would be perfect if it were overshadowed by the fear of possible loss. And Saint Thomas says that Heaven would not be Heaven if it did not last forever.

DEGREES OF HAPPINESS

Are all the souls of the Blessed happy in the same degree? They are not. It is an article of Faith that there are various degrees of happiness. In the *Decretum Unionis* of Florence the Church has declared: "One is more perfect than the other according to the different merits of each." Our blessed Saviour infers the varying degrees of happiness when He tells us: "In My Father's House there are many mansions." And Saint Paul assures us: "Each shall receive his own reward according to his own toil." . . . "He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly and he who soweth in blessings shall also reap blessings." The Fathers are as one in insisting that there are degrees of happiness. Saint Jerome for ex-

ample argues on the justice of the diversity of reward against Jovinian: "If the easier works of piety are equally meritorious with the constancy of the martyrs it is vain to strive for perfection" (*Contra Jovinium* 2, 34). And Saint Augustine meets the objection that jealousy would eventuate because of the inequality of reward by declaring: "There will be no envy on account of unequal glory because one love will govern all." Saint Thomas explains the inequality by the difference in intensity of each soul's love for God: "That intellect which has more of the light of glory will see God the more perfectly; and he will have a fuller participation of the light of glory who has more of charity, because where there is greater charity there is a more ardent desire; . . . hence he who possesses the greater charity will see God the more perfectly" (*Summa Theologica*, 1a, Question 12, Article 6).

From the inequality of heavenly glory the Scholastics have developed the doctrine of the "aureolae," that is special marks of distinction in the souls of those who have achieved victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. These marks are real and are special joys for special victories during life on earth. The victory of the virgin is a special triumph over the flesh, the victory of the martyr is a special conquest of the world, the victory of the doctor is a special victory over Satan who is the father of lies.

Saint John in his Apocalypse in struggling to express the happiness of Heaven said: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and death shall be no more. Nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things are passed away" (*Apoc.* 21, 4). The former things are human limitations, earth's drawbacks. For instance we lead lives of mind and sense.

And mind and sense are constantly coming into conflict. In Heaven the senses will be glorified and the mind enlightened. All human knowledge is limited. The knowledge enjoyed in Heaven will be a full knowledge. The mind will receive all it can hold and that means complete satisfaction. The will loving God and everything in God will have the perfection of love that on earth was impossible of attainment.

When Saint John and Saint Paul try to outline Heaven for us words fail them. When the saints who have been given special favors by God attempt to describe Heaven they speak like halting children. About the best description ever written is the statement of Saint Paul that Heaven defies description: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive" the happiness that God has prepared for those who love Him and die in His love. There is one little scene in the life of our Lord that makes a bit clear what it means to see God in Glory. It is the vision on Tabor. When our blessed Saviour flashed out His divinity for one instant the Apostles were so beside themselves with happiness that Saint Peter wanted to stay on the mountain always. It was the cry of a soul for the happiness of Heaven after experiencing the slightest foretaste and faintest vision of what God has in store for His elect.

HELL

AS the hope of Heaven is a good supernatural motive that inspires us to live practical Catholic lives, so is the fear of Hell a worthy supernatural motive to deter us from sin. Indeed our Lord in explaining everlasting suffering told His listeners to fear it. It is about the only thing He mentioned that was worth fearing. His constant appeal was to love. He was ceaseless in urging the love of the Father. His entire doctrine was an appeal to love for He came to introduce the Law of Love after the world had lived for centuries under the Law of Fear.

Nevertheless He insisted that we should be fearful of incurring God's wrath that finds its full expression in eternal punishment. One day he was predicting the terrible sufferings that would fall to the lot of His followers. They would be persecuted and tortured and many of them put to death. Their very own would turn against them. Yet He said these things were not to be feared but rather He was to be feared who in His eternal justice could send body and soul into the flames of Hell. Again when He spoke of the sin of scandal He warned His followers that it was better to go into eternity crippled and mutilated than to go whole into Hell fire. "If your hand scandalizes you, cut it off." That is to say any pain or torture in this life is better than the sufferings of eternity, and provided we fear eternal torments we may well scout any pains that this world knows of.

While He was ever the loving Saviour He spoke most

clearly of God's justice meting out eternal punishment to those who died defying His law. His explanation of the doctrine of eternal punishment is as clear as His statement that He would give His Flesh and Blood to be the food and drink of human souls. Anyone reading His account of Dives and Lazarus cannot fail to grasp this very real doctrine of eternal suffering. The circumstances surrounding the parable of the rich man and the beggar are of interest. Our Lord was striving to reach the hearts of the scribes and pharisees. But they were closed to His words for the very simple reason that they were hypocrites. Christ told them so. In stinging terms He exposed their insincerity and then began to show what the fate of the hypocrite would be.

In His parable He took a man of great wealth who made gold his god. He had everything this world could give and it so hardened his heart that he lost not only a sense of the divine but even a sense of the human. He was so utterly selfish that he could pass by a starving diseased beggar on his doorstep day after day and not give him a crumb of bread. Even the dogs of the street were more humane for they sensed suffering in open sores and relieved it in their brute way. They soothed the sores of Lazarus with their tongues. But not Dives. He ignored a fellow creature who asked for so little; just the crumbs that might fall from his table and be swept off as waste. Dives was the hardened criminal, the selfish hypocrite, the unrepentant sinner, though because of his wealth he may have enjoyed a very good reputation. But Christ gave him his true reputation for Christ knew his character. And when death came to him Christ said: "He was buried in Hell."

And looking up from his place of torment for the

first time he recognized Lazarus. He saw the beggar man in glory. He had seen him in poverty and suffering while they were both pilgrimaging through life. Dives was walking the path of luxury, Lazarus treading the road of pain. So the rich man never recognized the suffering beggar. But in his place of torment he did. And recognizing him he begged him for a favor. What was it? To dip the end of his finger in water and place it upon the rich man's tongue, for he said: "I am tormented in this flame."

The suffering must have been extreme for the man's idea of relief was just enough water to place on the finger tip, so little that it would evaporate almost instantly on a summer day. Yet it spelled relief so great was the agony endured in eternal flame. Whatever the nature of that flame it is clear that it had all the terrible qualities of earthly fire for it was consuming Dives with an agonizing thirst.

In explaining the pains of Hell the Church teaches us that the fire is real. It is not a figure of speech. It is not an exaggeration. It is strict truth. Remember it was a gentle Saviour who speaking of the condemnation of the unrepentant on the Last Day said: "Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels." As He was Eternal Truth it is reasonable to suppose that He meant what He said. And again when He spoke of removing the occasions of sin even to the extent of losing eye or hand or foot, He declared three separate times that this loss was better than going to "hell into unquenchable fire where their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished" (Mark 9, 42-47).

The Catholic Church has followed the teaching of our

Lord in defining the doctrine of eternal punishment. The Fourth Lateran Council decreed:

“The wicked with the devil will receive eternal punishment while the good with Christ will receive eternal glory.” In fact not only our Lord’s sacred words warrant the Church in her attitude but Scripture in many places warns men of God’s retribution. To cite but a few passages in the New Testament, we hear Saint Jude talking of “the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 1, 7). Saint John speaks of “a pool burning with fire and brimstone” (Apoc. 21, 8). Saint Paul mentions “eternal punishment in destruction” (2 Thess. 1, 9).

The Fathers of the Church from the days of Saint Ignatius of Antioch have spoken plainly of Hell. When this saintly bishop was writing to the Ephesians he declared that “if a man by false teaching corrupt the faith of God, for the sake of which Jesus Christ was crucified, such a man shall go . . . to the unquenchable fire as also shall he who listens to him” (Ad Ephes. 16, 2). Saint Justin, Martyr, appeals to God’s justice saying that if there is no Hell, “either there is no God, or if there is He does not concern Himself with men, virtue and vice mean nothing, and they who transgress important laws are punished unjustly by the lawgivers” (Apoc. 2, 9). And Saint John Chrysostom is even stronger in his assertion that: “All of us, Greeks and Jews, heretics and Christians acknowledge that God is just. Now many who sinned passed away without being punished, while many others who led virtuous lives did not die until they had suffered innumerable tribulations. If God is just how will He reward the latter and punish the former unless there be a Hell and a Resurrection?” (Homily on Ep. ad Phil. 6, 6.)

THE PUNISHMENT OF HELL

The nature of the punishment of Hell has never been defined by the Church. Theologians, however, have discussed it at some length. As we know from our catechisms there is the pain of loss and the pain of sense. The pain of loss is the more intense and the more terrible suffering. In losing God the soul loses everything. Saint Thomas very clearly explains the reason of this twofold pain:

“Punishment is proportionate to sin. Now sin comprises two things. First there is the turning away from the immutable good, which is infinite. Secondly there is the inordinate turning to mutable good. In this respect sin is finite, both because the mutable good itself is finite and because the movement of turning towards it is finite, since the acts of a creature cannot be infinite. Accordingly in so far as sin consists in turning away from God, its corresponding punishment is the pain of loss, which also is infinite because it is the loss of the infinite good, that is God. But in so far as sin turns inordinately (to the mutable good) its corresponding punishment is the pain of sense which also is finite” (Summa Theologica, 1a 2æ Q. 87).

The pain of loss consists in realizing that through its own fault the soul has lost the whole purpose of its being. It is a complete failure. In this life we talk of people who are failures but we do not know what real failure means. The loss of God by the damned soul is the only real failure. For this can never be remedied. Every loss in life can be remedied if by nothing else by a good death. But the lost soul is a total loss, the failure to find God for all eternity is complete failure. “Abandon hope all ye who enter here!”

When our blessed Saviour cried out to the lost souls, "Depart from Me ye cursed!" He meant what He said. The soul that has lost God has indeed God's curse upon it. Again when He speaks of the unrepentant sinners He tells them: "I know you not, whence you are; depart from Me all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13, 27). The souls He created and for whom He shed His Precious Blood, He no longer knows. They are as if they were not. He has done His best to save them and they have scorned His every act of love. They realize this as it never can be realized on earth, and that realization makes Hell. It is the pain of loss.

Saint John Chrysostom in portraying the pain of loss does not minimize the pain of sense. But he shows how trivial it is in comparison with the greater pain. In his homily on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, 23, n. 8, he says: "The fire of Hell is insupportable—who does not know it?—and its torments are awful. But if you were to heap a thousand hell-fires one on top of the other, it would be as nothing compared to the punishment of being excluded from the beatific glory of Heaven, hated by Christ and compelled to hear Him say, 'I know you not.'"

Because of the realization of the loss that is theirs the damned hate God, themselves, and every other creature. Hell is the home of hate. Here in this life we often are puzzled by meeting a good man who has apparently little or no love for God. He is naturally good. He is a fond parent, a devoted husband, fair and square in his dealings with his fellows. Yet he will tell you he has no interest in God. He will keep the Golden Rule and that will suf-

vice for his religion. When his time to die comes he may get the grace to make an act of perfect contrition. But the fact is he has not hated God, he has ignored Him. And God has left the spark of natural goodness in his soul in the hope that it may flame up toward the supernatural. He is still on his way but when his journey is ended he must either love or hate God. His natural will as a gift of God is good, but it cannot will good in Hell. If it does, it wills in the wrong way, if it does not, it wills bad. Saint Thomas tells us why:

“The damned are absolutely turned away from the final end of the rightly directed will. The will cannot be good except it be ordered to that end, so that even if the damned willed something good they would not will it in the right way, that is so that their will might be called good” (Comment. in Sent. 4, dist. 50, qu. 2., art. 1).

The pain of sense according to Catholic teaching is the pain caused by a sensible medium. This medium is called in Scripture fire. The Church has never said in a dogmatic definition anything about the nature of this fire. The Church has said that it is real, and not a metaphor. It is something created by God to punish as adequately as unrepented sin can be punished. As fire is the most intense form of human punishment this word as employed by the sacred writers and by our Lord Himself gives us as complete an idea as we are capable of getting of the intensity of eternal punishment. When we think on the scriptural expressions “furnace of fire,” “pool of fire and brimstone,” “external darkness where there is howling and gnashing of teeth,” “eternal fire,” our imaginations envision the idea of terrific punishment. Had our blessed Saviour told us the nature of this fire, or put its meaning on the lips of the inspired writers, we would not have

understood it. We could no more fully understand the nature of eternal punishment than we can understand the Beatific Vision. We can fully understand, however, the need of avoiding Hell as we can understand the wisdom of gaining Heaven. This is the practical understanding that God asks of us.

Besides the pain of loss and the pain of sense there are other sufferings endured by the lost soul. Remorse for instance which Scripture compares to a worm that will never die. So the poet expressed the pangs of natural sorrow. The recollection of happier days. Fancy then the soul recalling the graces myriad in number that marked its progress through life. Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion, the Sacrament of Penance, the prayers, the devotions of the Church, all sting now like scorpions in the bitter recollection of abused graces. "We fools," cry the damned for the endless ages of eternity. Salvation was so easy yet they would not take it. A little self-control, a little self-sacrifice, a little mortification and in reward everlasting happiness. But no. The human will was so weak and human nature so strange that there was time for every sacrifice but self-sacrifice. For reputation, for self-interest in temporal affairs, for pleasing false friends, for gratifying the soul's enemies there was always time. For pleasure that ended in a few hours, for business that occupied a few years, for money that served for the moment there was time. But not time in life for God! And now in the eternity of Hell there is neither time nor God, neither pleasure nor amusement, nothing but suffering, sorrow, disappointment. The remembrance of how easy salvation could have been! This is a bitter sorrow. And yet it is the least of the sorrows of the damned!

THE ETERNITY OF HELL

It is an article of Faith that Hell is eternal. It was defined in the Council of Constantinople in the year 543. The Fifth General Council approved this definition ten years later. This belief is contained in the Athanasian Creed: "They that have done good shall go into everlasting happiness, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire." The New Testament when it speaks of the fire of Hell calls it everlasting. The Fathers of the Church speak in the same vein. "You threaten me with fire," Saint Polycarp told his persecutors, "which burns but for an hour and then is extinguished; for you do not know the eternal fire of punishment reserved for the wicked."

And from the standpoint of common sense there is no more reason for Hell's punishment ceasing than there is for the happiness of Heaven ceasing. God's justice governs both reward and punishment. If as we have seen Heaven would not be Heaven unless happiness was everlasting then surely there would be no Hell without eternity characterizing its punishment. To many people the idea of eternal punishment is abhorrent. It clashes they say with the idea of God's mercy. But they forget that God is just and Hell is the vindication of His justice. He would not be God if He were not just, and if He did not punish as He rewards. His mercy is infinite and it struggles with the rebellious soul up to the last breath of life. When the last instant of reckoning comes God does not say: "I condemn the soul I have created and loved and died for to Hell." No. But the soul says: "In spite of all God has done for me I refuse to do the right and in my foolish fury take the consequences of His wrath." Against every effort the soul plunges into Hell.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN SACRED SCRIPTURE

And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some unto life everlasting and others unto reproach to see it always. (Daniel 12, 2.)

Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? . . . Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings? (Isaias 33, 14.)

And they shall fall after this without honor, and be a reproach among the dead forever. (Wisdom 4, 19.)

A land of misery and darkness where the shadow of death and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth. (Job 10, 22.)

The Lord Almighty will take revenge on them, in the day of judgment He will visit them. For He will give fire and worms into their flesh, that they may burn and feel forever. (Judith 16, 20, 21.)

The chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. (Luke 3, 17.)

And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting. (Matthew 25, 46.)

And if thy hand scandalize thee cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell, into unquenchable fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished. (Mark 9, 42, 43.)

PURGATORY

THOSE who die in venial sin cannot see God at once. This is reasonable. As they do not deserve eternal punishment they pass into an intermediate state that we call Purgatory. Here the last blemish left by sin is removed and the soul then wings its flight into God's presence. Again there are those who die and have not paid the temporal punishment for mortal sin repented of in this life. There was not time or there was not the generosity requisite for performing the necessary penance. The penalty for mortal and for venial sins not paid for in this life is a debt on the soul. It must be paid for in all justice. As the soul has passed beyond the time of merit it must suffer in Purgatory till the dross of sin is removed. It can do nothing but suffer. This is the meaning of Purgatory, a state of punishment and purification.

The Church in teaching the doctrine of Purgatory refers her children to many passages in Holy Writ. The best known scriptural foundation for the doctrine is found in the Second Book of Machabees. It tells of the deeds of Judas Machabeus and mentions his devotion to the dead. And we must remember that this devotion was the common practice of his people as it is of the Catholic Church today. After battle it is stated that the leader of the hosts of Israel collected alms. "And making a gathering he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead.) And because he considered that they

who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins" (2 Mach. 12, 43-46).

It is plain that the belief of the leader of the Jews and of his people recorded with approbation by the sacred writer was that there was punishment for sin in the next world and that this punishment could be mitigated by the prayers of the living. This is what the Church teaches on Purgatory.

There is also a text in Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that Saint Augustine appeals to in explaining the doctrine of Purgatory. The Apostle was writing of the solid foundation of the doctrine of Christ: "For other foundation no man can lay but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. Every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall declare every man's work what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3, 11-15).

Saint Augustine and other Fathers hold in explanation of this passage that useless doctrines are not to be mingled with the solid rock of Christ's doctrine. They are wood, hay, stubble. In the fire test the real foundation will remain and everything else, venial sins not mortal will be consumed by fire. It is the Pauline doctrine that a soul may be saved and yet suffer temporal punishment in the hereafter. What Saint Paul taught has been consistently held as Catholic doctrine from earliest times.

THE SUFFERINGS OF PURGATORY

The souls in Purgatory suffer a twofold pain, the pain of loss and the pain of sense. The pain of loss consists in being deprived of the vision of God which is the essential happiness of Heaven. For a brief instant at the particular judgment the soul has seen God. That vision has filled it with longing. Nothing else matters. Life and its distractions are passed. It is now God or nothing. As the possession of God is the great happiness of Heaven, the loss of God the great pain of Hell, so is the loss of God even though the soul knows it is but for a time, the all-piercing pain of Purgatory. There is too the other suffering called the pain of sense. Saint Thomas teaches the twofold pain as follows:

“In Purgatory the suffering is twofold; that of loss inasmuch as the soul is kept back from the vision of God; and that of sense since they shall be punished by fire. Now in both respects the least pain in Purgatory exceeds the greatest pain in this life.”

This is the common teaching of the Church. The nature of the pain of sense has never been defined. Its reality has never been doubted. Most theologians hold that it is the pain of fire. What is said of the fire of Hell is true of the fire of Purgatory, duration alone making them different. It is real. And while we cannot tell its constituents as we can the constituents of earthly fire, it has all the fearful effects that make earthly fire the all-terrible pain. Its duration of course is limited by time. The Last Day will see only Heaven and Hell. From the practice of the Church in encouraging prayers for the dead without ceasing we may conclude that the punishment in Purgatory lasts a long time. Or it may be that God crowds into a

brief space of earthly time centuries of purgatorial suffering. No one can say for no one knows. But what is clear from the tradition of the Church is that souls suffer in Purgatory till the last debt of the temporal punishment due for sin is paid. Till then the soul cannot see God and enjoy the happiness of Heaven.

As the Church teaches the doctrine of Purgatory so does she point the way to relief for the Suffering Souls. The prayers and good works of the members of the Kingdom of God on earth bring relief to Christ's suffering members in Purgatory. As their time of merit is over they must rely on their friends to assist them. "Have pity on me at least you my friends for the hand of the Lord hath afflicted me." This is their prayer. And it is one of the consolations of our religion to know that our least good work, our shortest prayer, our slightest mortification, and above all the Holy Sacrifice and Holy Communion, can reach across the barriers of time, and render help to the Suffering Souls.

The indulgenced prayers of the Church are especially intended for the relief of the Souls in Purgatory. An indulgenced prayer is one whose value is written in terms of remission of temporal punishment due for sin. The Church by drawing on the superabundant merits of Christ, the merits of our Blessed Mother and the saints gives special efficacy to an indulgenced prayer. This prayer she tells us to apply to the Souls in Purgatory and not only for all the souls lingering there but for the particular soul we have in mind. The Church in so doing draws on her treasury of good works accumulated during the ages. With this great wealth at her disposal the Church enhances the value of our poor prayers.

"Lay this body anywhere, my son, but wherever you

may be, pray for my soul at God's Altar," was Monica's last request of Augustine. In the grief of his great soul Augustine never forgot his mother's wish. That is the Catholic spirit. We love our dead for we know they live. We wish to speed their living close to God and in the official prayer of the Church or in our own simple words we ask God to be mindful of those "who have gone before us with the sign of Faith, and sleep in the sleep of peace. O most merciful Lord Jesus give unto them eternal rest."

DISCUSSION CLUB OUTLINE

Prepared by Rev. Gerald C. Treacy, S.J.

I

We know the other world is real because the Infallible Church teaches us this. The other world has two eternal divisions, Heaven and Hell, and one temporary. This is God's revelation. Frequently our Lord spoke of Heaven. It is a state of unending happiness and the place where God dwells with His angels and saints (1).

Not only Catholics but all sensible people who know that the soul will last forever believe in Heaven. It is reasonable to believe this because every one knows he cannot get complete happiness in this life, yet he wants it with all his desires. God has given him the desire, so He will fulfill it. The fulfillment of all desires is Heaven. Heaven is also the reward of a good life on earth. Our Lord teaches this in promising "a reward everlasting" for the act of charity (2).

There are many opinions about Heaven's location, but the truth is we do not know where Heaven is. The real thing to know is that Heaven is happiness. From St. John's teaching it may be gathered that after the Last Judgment this earth will be Heaven. It will be "a new earth" (3).

From the statements of St. Peter and others this earth will be renewed by fire at our Lord's second coming, and then it will be Heaven for the just. Not only Christian but pagan writers claimed that the earth would be destroyed and then renewed by fire (4, 5).

If this earth renewed and purified is to be the home of the blessed at the end of the world it will be wonderfully beautiful. The real happiness of Heaven consists in seeing and enjoying God as He is. This is called the Beatific Vision and it is seen only because God gives man the power to see through grace. No natural sight could reach God (6, 7).

Questions

- Is the other world real?
- What are its three divisions?
- Do only Catholics believe in Heaven?
- What is Heaven a reward for?
- Where is Heaven?
- What is the Beatific Vision?

II

God cannot be comprehended by a human mind, but He can be reached. St. Thomas explains that. This reaching of God by man is a mystery, but we can learn something about it. The blessed in Heaven see and know God in a way that is different from any sight or knowledge on earth (8, 9).

The soul in Heaven receives special gifts. These constitute its dowry. The body after the general resurrection will have its special gifts too. Another source of Heaven's happiness is freedom from sin or even the inclination to sin. Still another is freedom from ignorance (10, 11).

The happiness of Heaven lasts forever. This truth is an article of faith. Moreover there are different degrees of happiness for each one and yet each is completely happy. The idea of completeness is the nearest approach we can make to understanding the happiness of Heaven (12, 15).

Questions

- What does the soul need in order to see God?
- May God be comprehended?
- How may comprehension be understood?
- What is the dowry of the blessed?
- Is this dowry in the body and the soul?
- Can the blessed in Heaven sin?
- Does Heaven's happiness ever end?
- Are all equally happy or are there degrees in happiness?
- If there is inequality in happiness is their discontent?

III

Our Lord Who spoke of the happiness of Heaven also spoke of the sufferings of Hell. There is nothing clearer in all His teaching. The parable of Dives and Lazarus, the words of our Lord on the punishment for the sin of scandal show that there is real fire of torment whatever the nature of the fire. The supreme torment is the loss of God. That makes Hell. Besides the pain of loss and sense, there are other sufferings endured by the lost. Remorse for opportunities lost, remembrance of happier times. Hell, like Heaven, is eternal (16, 25).

Questions

- What did our Lord teach about Hell?
 Should we fear it?
 What does the parable of Dives and Lazarus prove?
 Is the fire of Hell real?
 Is it like the fire on earth?
 What have the Fathers of the Church taught about everlasting punishment?
 What does the Church teach regarding its nature?
 What is the pain of loss, of sense?
 Are there other sufferings?
 Does the Bible mention Hell?

IV

Those who have not atoned for sins committed in life and yet die in God's grace cannot enter Heaven at once. They dwell in Purgatory. The Church teaches this as an article of Faith. Its proof is found in many parts of the Bible, and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. The souls in Purgatory suffer the pain of loss and of sense; they cannot help themselves, but we can help them by prayer. The indulgenced prayers of the Church are especially intended for their relief (26, 30).

Questions

- What is the meaning of Purgatory?
 What does the Church teach about it?
 Are its sufferings real?
 May the suffering souls help themselves?
 How do we help them?
 What are the prayers especially intended for their benefit?

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