

Ultimate Things

We all want to go to Heaven when we die. But do we know what we are talking about when we express this desire? We also want “eternal life,” but whatever this is isn’t exactly self-evident. And there are other words used to name the after-life such as “paradise,” “glory,” and “the beatific vision” which are part of the confusing mix.

As Catholic Christians, we believe that sanctification is necessary for one to go to Heaven. Heaven is the direct vision of God and a place or, perhaps more precisely, a “state of being” which is free of all sin, evil, corruption, etc.

But there are problems with this conception of things when we consider all the saints who are there waiting for the Day of Resurrection. Presumably, before that great day, they are deprived of their bodies? This would seem to be a cause for some suffering, at least in the form of some anticipation to be made truly “whole” again.

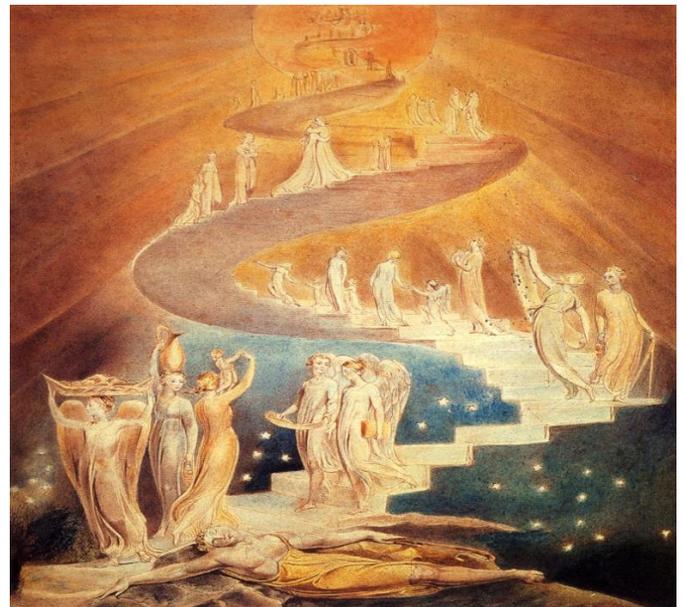
In answer to such a concern, the Catechism and a proper definition of “eternity” would correct our misperceptions. Quoting Pope Benedict XII, the Catechism teaches the following:

*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.*
(CCC 1023)

Herein, it seems that the compensation for being deprived of the body is the vision of God, defined as “the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness. (CCC 1024) So, it might be said that the vision of God, as seen with the “eyes” of the soul

will contain every possible joy, including the joy of reuniting with the body.

However, rightly understood, one who is in Heaven lives outside of time and space: It is “eternal life.” We should not equate eternity with infinity. Infinity could be a torturous, mind numbing, boring forever and ever and ever! Whereas, eternity is an inconceivably intense, rich and full NOW. There is no time. Time no longer governs human life and experience. Hence, there cannot be any sense of waiting or impatience or anticipation. Life is fulfilled! Nothing is wanting! All is present and abundant! **And so, the experience of the “temporary” separation of the body from the soul after death and in heaven must be experienced as if no time has elapsed at all!**



The Resurrection of the Dead, Armageddon, the End of the World and the Second Coming all concern the consummation of history. It is unclear what the relationship between time and eternity is with respect to these distinct elements. Are they simultaneous or are they sequential as some Biblical literalists would have us believe? Whatever the case, it will be a glorious culmination of the work of salvation, the restoration of bodies to the saints, and New Heavens and a New Earth. Any attempt to visualize this is fraught with distortions of the imagination. It can only be, as stated, “*the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.*” What could be better?