

# Heaven Is Not Boring

**M**ost people have a view of what heaven is like similar to the description in Isaiah 6: "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple. Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they hovered. One cried out to the other 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!' No wonder some people want to wait to die. Just imagine standing around the throne of God singing 24 hours a day for all eternity. Even people who love music might find this to be a bit much. It is good to know music will be found in heaven. Don't worry though, it is only some of the angels around God's throne who sing all the time. So what do humans do in heaven? There are a few things that have to be understood first:

## I

In our Church's catechism (*Christ—Our Pascha*) is pointed out: *Every human being that comes into the world is called to grow in likeness to God—to achieve. [124] Divinization [also known as deification, the process of Theosis]: "God has given us, through these things, His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pt 1:4). This partaking in God's nature constitutes human happiness. All the spiritual practices that we do have the end goal of making us happy. We are complete when we are partakers of the divine nature. Simply if God is happy, they will be happy. But, the only way for this to happen is by free choice and assent, and by cooperation with God's grace. "Our likeness to God requires our cooperation. When the intellect begins to perceive the Holy Spirit with full consciousness, we should realize that grace is beginning to paint the divine likeness over the divine image in us. (Diadochos of Photiki)"*

## II

*Christ—Our Pascha* 253 states: *For humankind to*

*be in a glorified state is to participate in the life of the Most Holy Trinity, together with the most holy Mother of God, the angels, and all the saints. Tradition calls this state heaven.*

## III

Death is not the separation of the soul from the body as St John of Damascus begins his discourse *Concerning the Resurrection*. When the immortal soul is resurrected, "It is, then, this very body, which is corruptible and liable to dissolution, that will rise again incorruptible." As the Creator built up the body of the man, He shall reach down into the grave and take a seed (cell) and build up the glorified body. This spiritual glorified body is recognizable, as our Lord was recognized by Doubting Thomas. It is a body though that has no material needs. It cannot get sick. It has no need for food or drink. It does not sleep. This body is not hauled into courts for there are no courts of justice, no businesses, no money (the beginning of evil, the excuse for wars, the root of hatred); *but a land of the living* (St Maximos the Confessor). We can eat though as we see our Lord consumed fish following His resurrection.

We are living human beings, body and soul. We do not become bodiless creatures, nor do we become angels.

## IV

St Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians of a person with a glimpse of heaven. Some may be dramatic and described in near-death experiences. Probably, the best glimpse of this heavenly experience are those moments when intense love and great happiness come together. We do not want to leave those moments. In heaven, we do not have to leave. The reason for this combination of love and happiness is that God is love and when liturgically we speak of heaven two words are commonly used: happiness and blessed, which in many ways are synonymous.

Another glimpse is our participation in the Eucharist. (*Christ—Our Pascha* 247): *The glorification of a Christian's body already takes place in the Mystery*

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*of the Most Holy Eucharist, when it becomes one with the glorified Christ. "[The Eucharistic] breaking of one bread ... is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying." (Ignatius of Antioch) Thus, a human being grows to become a "spiritual body" (see 1 Cor 15:44): "Our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity (Irenaeus of Lyons)."*

#### V

The Western tradition uses the term "Beatific Vision". This, too, sounds boring. We get to see God. The Eastern Churches keep it simple usually to say just to see the face of God. (*Christ—Our Pascha* 253). This may sound boring also, but it should be looked at in terms of seeing the face of the person you love. Especially when you see their love for you. You just do not see their face, you see their whole beauty. Some may say that it is not appropriate to compare divine love with human love. In the 30th step of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* St John Climacus writes: "There is nothing wrong in representing desire, and fear, and care and zeal and service and love for God in images borrowed from human life. Blessed is he who has obtained such love and yearning for God as an enraptured lover has for his beloved. ... If the face of a loved one clearly and completely changes us and makes us cheerful, gay and care-free, what will the Face of the Lord not do when He makes His Presence felt invisibly in a pure soul?" It brings about a sense of wonder and awe. Just think because of your sharing in the divine nature, you will know to a greater degree than you do now the wonders of the universe. Everything you have ever wondered about or had wanted to ask God is there for you to explore. The questions you have now will open up whole new lanes to questions to explore for all eternity.

#### VI

Scripture tells us that we recognize people after death. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, both were identifiable after death. At the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah recognized Jesus and each other.

If the mother-son relationship remains in heaven, as we can see in the Theotokos relationship with the Word of God. A mother does not create a child. God is the

author of all life, so the connection of families is divinely established and remains in the afterlife. This goes beyond recognition. St John Chrysostom to a young widow wrote: "For such is the power of love, it embraces, and unites, and fastens together not only those present and near, and visible but also those who are distant, and neither length of time, nor separation in space, nor anything else of that kind can break up and sunder in pieces the affection of the soul. ... then assuredly thou shalt depart one day to join the same company with him, not to dwell with him for five years as thou didst here, nor for 20, or 100, nor for a thousand or twice that number but for infinite and endless ages ... If thou wilt exhibit the same manner of life as his, and then thou shalt receive him back again no longer in that corporeal beauty which he had when he departed, but in the luster of another kind, and splendor outshining the rays of the sun." We will all be beautiful to each other in the next life regardless of how we looked in this world.

#### VII

What shall we do "all day"? Our Lord speaks of mansions and of banquets, both of which are human expressions of the good life surrounded by family and friends. There is also work in heaven. If you have lived the good life, you hope and pray that on Judgment Day, the Lord will say as He said to the man with ten talents: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy." One of those responsibilities we can see in our devotion to the saints, namely intercession. We ask saints to pray for our intentions. Those in heaven are the saints. Also in heaven, there is nothing that is hidden, so in the love of families, those in heaven can intercede for those on earth (Maccabees). There are thrones set up in heaven for judgments to be made. I may suppose that these judgments can be when intercessions are in contradiction.

Heaven is a creative, exciting, wonderful and meaningful state. Heaven is not boring, there is work to be done, prayers to be offered, wonders to explore, people to love and to know, happiness to be had all in a life of complete joy and love in God.

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