

All Dogs Go to Heaven

Children wonder if the pets they love will be with them in heaven forever and probably some adults as well. There are many different ways of answering this question.

As Catholics, we do tend to look at what the pope has to say. Many people have quoted Pope Francis on this matter. Based upon what he said in *Laudato si'*, the media reported that he said pets go to heaven. "Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of the beings is the object of His love, and in its few seconds of existence. God enfolds it with His affection. St. Basil the Great described the Creator 'as goodness without measure'. [77]" In the same document, the pope also said: "The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ ... the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God ... to lead all creatures back to their creator. [83]" Later he writes, "Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give to those poor men and women who have been liberated once and for all. [243]" These quotes do not seem to answer the question despite what CNN put in its articles that Pope Francis has declared pets are in heaven. Pope St. Paul VI in consoling a boy whose pet dog had died said, "one day we will see our pets in the eternity." These papal statements are opinions and not the teaching of the Church since, in neither case is it the decision of a council. Nor is it a pontiff speaking *ex cathedra* on faith and morals making an infallible proclamation which Catholics have to affirm. So the popes leave it up to us.

The question in the West revolves around "do animals have souls?" Well,

some of the Latin Fathers have said "yes, but their souls are not immortal." Others have said that they "do not have immortal souls, but they do have souls which give them personality". The Western Church Father St. Thomas Aquinas noted animals have a desire to achieve perfection. This is the goal of all creatures with souls. Animals cannot reach perfection; only human beings can. But like human beings, animals need help in their growth. That is why they have close relationships in many cases with human beings for humans to grow towards perfection. Animals, because of humans, can grow towards an imperfect perfection.

What about heaven, then? The Western view of heaven as a "place" of happiness or a state of existing in happiness. Understandably, people would, in the Western Tradition, find their pets in heaven for them to attain happiness. The views of heaven in the West are based in scripture with images of mansions and meals showing a new earth that resembles the old earth. So, what would give you happiness in the old earth will follow through in the new earth, the kingdom of heaven. So, it is perfectly reasonable in the Western tradition that there will be living creatures, animals, in heaven. But these animals, which would bring happiness, would not be the same as the animals that lived on earth because when they died, their mortal soul would die with them.

The Byzantine view is tied in with the doctrine of *Theosis*. It does not deny that the state of existence is joyful, but instead places emphasis on the continued growth towards God. This development is accomplished in love. On earth, it is common to see pets, especially dogs, from this heavenly perspective. Pets provide unconditional love, which helps their human in their growth towards perfection. In a sense, wouldn't it be better if people were more like their pets? Animals keep alive in their "masters" a sense of play. As our Lord said, "Let the children come to me"

and "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." The child in us keeps alive the sense of wonder and awe, which is the "daily" experience of heaven. As a child is always dependent upon others, we need to be reminded that we are dependent upon God. As an adult, we feel that we are not worthy of the great love our pets express for us. As a cartoon showing a dog sitting on the divine throne in heaven, captioned wasn't it obvious? Pets help our growth in our perfection.

Pets bring out our love. Pets move us in love. This world does not provide all the loving stimuli that move us in love to God. Pets are a divine resource or guide in preparing us for our next life with God. In the heavenly plain of existence, we have come into the sharing of the divine life and love in the most personal and intimate ways. It is this love that will fill and answer all our needs. Pets then will not be necessary. There will be no aspect of our life that will be empty and needed to be filled.

The need for pets is due to the Fall. All of nature was out of its proper order. Nature felt this disruption, not only human beings. Nature wanted to be restored to the way it was in creation. When Jesus was told to quiet the people down, He responded that the rocks and stones themselves would shout out. Even rocks would be used to express that nature is desirous of the change, the restoration.

So, it is therefore possible that our pets are a divine tool not only in perfecting us but also in nature's purpose in the restoration. Every part of nature is part of this divine plan. For this reason, a sparrow does not fall from the sky without God's knowledge and care.

In the descriptions of heaven that use earthly imagery, we are told of plants. Plants are living and part of the heavenly plan. If heaven is the opportunity for our continued growth in *Theosis*, would not God give us every opportunity in love to



grow? Therefore, since God used pets to move us in the direction of love in this earthly kingdom, would it not be logical for them also to be part of the experience of the next life? They would not be necessary, but they might be helpful for some individuals. God in His divine grace and assistance is abundant.

Byzantines have a theological leaning towards not defining or structuring. For example, for Latins, Christ becomes pres-

ent at the words of consecration; for us, it is sometime during the anaphora. We leave things up to God and accept that what we receive is the real presence of Jesus. Details then are left to the divine. We, as Easterners do not define what heaven is (the Western approach). Rather we describe heaven by saying what heaven is not: it is not without God. Therefore heaven is filled with the divine. So, as an older priest once said in my presence to a young

boy who lost his dog, "If your dog will bring you closer to God, your dog will be in heaven. If your dog is no longer needed in your life, like when you are older, your dog will not be in heaven. The important question is, 'will *you* be in heaven?' After that question is answered, continue to leave your life in God's hands, and you will have God, which is all you need, and God will take care of the rest."

Fr Jonathan Morse

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and Patriarchal Assemblies-Sobors. He watches over the development of each eparchy and serves to ensure that its needs are met. He proclaims synodal decisions and church laws, which thus acquire canonical force. At the same time he also is guarantor of the full and visible communion of our Church with the successor of St. Peter, and has the right to speak fully on her behalf. He is, in fact, a servant-minister of this unity-in-love of all parts of our Church. The Head of our Church is given the particular task of pastoral care over all the faithful of our Church, especially over those who reside outside its pastoral structures. In order that this care be provided in an adequate and timely fashion, he is called to promote the creation of suitable pastoral centers, and further, the creation of new ecclesial structures should this be required by the good of our faithful. He has particular care over the liturgical life of our Church and ensures uniformity in the celebration of Divine worship worldwide. But above all, he is called to be a faithful and sincere brother to his fellow bishops and a good spiritual father for the entire church community.

Beloved in Christ! Church unity is a living relationship of love with God and neighbor. It must constantly be guarded, built up. We must forever grow in it. Only by growing in the communion and unity of our Church can we come to know fully her identity, that particular way of being Christian. Each member of our Church, as well as each parish, eparchy, metropolia, will be able to "be ourselves," not assimilate in this globalized world, preserve our identity, be able to hand it down to a new generation and share it with other nations, when we will value, build and guard the internal unity of the global community of the UGCC.

The internal unity of the UGCC is synonymous with her strength and development, a necessary condition for her life and the fulfillment of her mission. In one of our popular hymns, we pray: "In unity is the strength of a people. God grant unity to us."

The crown of development and maturity of a particular Eastern Church is her patriarchal structure and dignity. Our Patriarchate is

thus built on a foundation of development and assured strengthening of the internal unity of our Church at all levels. The lay patriarchal movement expressed this eloquently: "For the unity of Church and people!" A weakening of this unity, especially with the mother-Church in Ukraine, will inevitably bring on a weakening and fragmentation of our ecclesial community, the demise of her structures, the loss of her identity and her global character.

The Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, is by its very nature "a mystery of unity," to which all humankind is called. With our particular gifts and our common ministry, all of us—clergy, religious and laity, are called to foster the development and strengthening of the communion-unity of our Church at all levels: from the local to the global, from the particular to the universal.

May our Lord help all of us, each in accordance with their vocation or gift of service in our Church, to be bearers and builders of her internal unity.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

On behalf of the Synod of Bishops of the
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church



+SVIATOSLAV

Chernobyl

Given in Rome,

*At the Cathedral of Saint Sophia—Divine Wisdom,
On the day of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo
and the Synaxis of the Venerable Fathers of the
Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv,*

The 10th day of September in the Year of Our Lord, 2019

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Priest Honored

The Legion of Merit Medal is a decoration presented to members of the United States Military, as well as foreign military members and political figures, who have displayed exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements. The performance must be of significant importance and far exceed what is expected by normal standards.

In contemporary use in the U.S. Armed Forces, the Legion of Merit is typically awarded to Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force general officers and colonels, and Navy and Coast Guard flag officers and captains occupying senior command or very senior staff positions in their respective services.

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Jonathan Morse was awarded the Legion of Merit by Major General Raymond Dingle, Acting Commander of U.S. Army Medical Command on July 15, 2019, upon the recommendation of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Messina. In his recommendation he wrote, "CH (LTC) Morse's contributions in significant religious support positions at the highest levels, in both peacetime and in combat, have made lasting impacts on multiple units and thousands of Soldiers throughout his career. His selfless work, helping Soldiers and improving the Chaplain Corps through mentorship and published work has



Major General Jones pins the medal [inset] on CH (LTC) Morse, observed by LTC Messina.

had an immeasurable effect on the future of the chaplaincy. His dedication to the Army has been unfaltering and he is undoubtedly deserving of the highest recognition." It was presented by Major General Jones of the Military District of Washington.

Webinar By "God With Us Online" Launched

Long-involved in producing catechetical materials for Eastern Catholic churches, schools and individuals, God With Us Publications debuted its Internet version of sharing the treasury of faith on Wednesday, September 11, 2019.

Over 800 subscribers joined together to explore the depths of theological insight of the Christian East.



Though the participants were physically in a multitude of locations from all the inhabited continents of Earth, distance was no issue. In fact the diverse nature of places, time zones and variety of jurisdictional allegiances served to illustrate the far-reaching and pervasive scope of the topic of the day's discussion: The Face of God

The Face of God happens to be the title

of a book by Archbishop JOSEPH (Raya). Born in 1916 in Zahlé, Lebanon, he was a prominent Melkite Greek Catholic archbishop, theologian, civil rights advocate and author. He served as metropolitan of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee from 1968 until 1974 and was particularly known for his commitment to seeking reconciliation between Christians,

Jews and Muslims. He was also a leading advocate of celebrating the Divine Liturgy in vernacular languages. He studied in Paris before entering St. Anne's Seminary in Jerusalem in 1937, and ordained a priest of the Melkite Catholic Church on July 20, 1941. He later taught at the Patriarchal College in Cairo, but later expelled from Egypt in 1948 by King Farouk for defending the rights of women. He emigrated to the United States in 1949.

As a priest in Alabama, Raya advocated for younger generations to have church services in their own languages, and translated the Byzantine Divine Liturgy into English. Raya invited Bishop Fulton J.

Sheen, the famous Catholic television personality to celebrate the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in English in 1958 at the Melkite National Convention. Bishop Sheen celebrated the Liturgy in English on television

The Roman Catholic archbishop of Mobile, Alabama, banned Raya from celebrating the Divine Liturgy in English in December of 1959. However, Pope John XXIII intervened in March, 1960 at the request of Melkite Patriarch MAXIMOS IV (Sayegh) to decide the question in favor of the Byzantine custom of celebrating the Divine Mysteries in the vernacular. In 1963 Raya's liturgical translation was declared an official English translation.

He was appointed Archbishop of Akka (Israel) ordained by Patriarch MAXIMOS V (Hakim) of Antioch, co-consecrators were Archbishop PAUL (Achkar) of Laodocia and Bishop STEPHEN (Kocisko) of Pittsburgh, October 20, 1968.

He was elevated to the dignity of Grand Archimandrite of Jerusalem and appointed as a member of the Melkite patriarchal del-

