

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

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THERE is a story told of the days when the first Christian missionaries came to preach the Gospel to our heathen forefathers. It is related that a certain king, hearing of one of these new teachers, called his counselors together to decide whether or not he should be received. And one of the old heathen priests stood up and said, "Hear me, O King. Sometimes it happens on a cold and dark winter night, when we are gathered together in this hall, and all is warm and bright within, that a little bird flies in out of the darkness; it remains a few moments in the light and warmth of the hall, and then again disappears into the darkness. And such is our human life. We come, we know not whence; we are here for a little space in this bright and beautiful world, and then we pass out again, we know not whither, into the dark unknown. Therefore my counsel is that we ask this new teacher Whether he can solve that mystery, and, if he can, let us gladly hear him."

From time to time at least this question forces itself upon everyone: What becomes of us, when we go out into the darkness? What happens after death? Nothing is more certain than that every one of us must die. It may be soon, or it may be a few years distant but, in any case, not many years. And what then? You may put the question aside for a time; you may fill your thoughts with the affairs of this world; but sooner or later the haunting question returns. And so people discuss it, they write books and articles about it, giving their opinions and their reasons. And how eagerly they are all read!—although for the most part the writers merely darken counsel with many words. And so others, despairing of finding a solution through reason and argument, have recourse to the ancient practices of necromancy, revived in our day under the name of "Spiritualism". They are told that by certain means they can get into direct contact with the spirits of the dead, and learn from them the secrets of that other life, although what guarantee they think they have that the spirits, if, they do come, are not lying spirits masquerading as the souls of their dead friends it is difficult to imagine. Indeed, one would think that the strange jumble of follies and contradictions, which make up most of these so-called revelations, would settle the matter for any sane man. A witty American, who had read many of them, summed it up very well by saying, that if these people had really "tapped the other world," it was evident that they had "tapped it at the lunatic asylum end."

We Catholics, however, answer these questions in a very different way. We do not indulge in vague speculations. Much less do we seek for information by attempting in unlawful ways to call up the spirits of the dead. For we believe and are sure that God Himself has told us all that we need to know. We believe that God has spoken. He has given us a clear and definite revelation, and has committed that revelation to His Church, which, according to His promise and by His assistance, teaches it clearly and without error to all who choose to listen. It is therefore not any human opinions that will be set forth in this pamphlet, but the things that God has revealed to us.

THE TWO WAYS

In the first place, then, God has clearly revealed to us the purpose or end for which He created us. He created us to live for ever in perfect and eternal happiness in union with Him in Heaven. So our Catechism begins with these questions and answers: "Who made you?—God made me—Why did God make you?—God made me to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next." Of what Heaven means we shall try to get a clearer idea later. But we must first understand that, although that is the end for which God created us, all men do not reach that end. How often we hear that phrase on the lips of foolish people, speaking of our eternal destiny, that "we are all going the same way." People assume that, whatever the next world may be like, if there is any sort of happy state hereafter, somehow or other all men will attain to it. That is one of the most horrible deceptions, by which the devil leads men astray; and those who encourage the notion are doing the devil's work most effectually, lulling men's consciences to sleep, only to prepare for them a terrible awakening, when it is too late. No, we are not all going the same way. Some of us are going one way, and some another. And the two ways are directly opposite. Some of us will reach that glorious end, others will not. And the destiny of these latter will be very different, as we shall see presently.

GOD'S GIFT OF LIFE

On what, then, does our final destiny depend? Briefly, it depends upon whether, at the moment of death, we are in a "state of grace" or not. But this requires a few words of explanation. In order to be capable of that perfect union with God, for which He destines us, we have to be endowed by Him with a new life, a "supernatural" life. By nature, as we come into this world, we have not the capacity for union with God. The distance between the uncreated Being of God and our created being is too great. We must first be raised above our natural state. We must receive the gift of an entirely new and higher kind of life than that which we have by nature, raising us above the level of mere nature, making us fit to participate in the life of God Himself. That is the gift which is known as "Sanctifying Grace." It is a spark, as it were, of the divine life, which raises us to God's level, making us capable of a real friendship and intimate union with Him.

This is the gift that comes through Jesus Christ. It was to this that He referred, when He said, "I am come that they may have life." The Eternal Son of God came into the world, in order to bring to us this gift of a divine life, and it is only from Him that we can have it. Grace flows from Him to us. Normally it flows to us through the Church, which is His Body, and the Sacraments which He instituted for this purpose. We receive it first in Baptism, the Sacrament of the New Birth, and it is nourished and increased by the other sacraments. Normally, therefore, in order to have the gift of grace -it is necessary to belong to the Catholic Church. That is the way that God has appointed. But in fact the, grace of God does, as it were, overflow the appointed channels. To those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Catholic Church, and try to serve God in the best way they know, He gives grace in other ways. Indeed, God offers grace to every man, and it is entirely a man's own fault if he does not choose to use it. But we need not go further into that now. Our point is that grace is an absolute necessity. No man can get to Heaven by living a life that is merely naturally good. He must somehow receive the gift of grace.

But even when we have received this gift, we may lose it. So long as we obey God's commandments we keep it. But it may be lost by grave sin. If a man commits what is called a "mortal" sin, which means a grave and deliberate act of disobedience to God, he at once loses this gift of grace. He has, as it were, turned his back on God. He has forfeited God's friendship. He has cut himself off from God, the Source of life, and his soul is dead. Still, God in His infinite mercy does not yet forsake him altogether. As long as the man remains in this world, God offers him the grace to repent. And, when he does repent, there is the Sacrament of Penance, by which the sin can be forgiven, and the man restored to grace and to God's friendship. Or, if for any reason the sacrament is not available, an act of perfect contrition is enough; that is, an act of sorrow for his sin made out of the pure motive of love for God. And it is in this way that those who, through no fault of their own, do not belong to the Catholic Church can be restored to grace.

It is clear, then, that during this earthly life a man may receive God's grace, lose it and regain it many times, because in this life our wills are variable. He may remain for a time in God's friendship and grace, and then foolishly turn away from Him. Then he may turn back to Him again. And that may happen time after time, so that he is alternately in a state of grace and in a state of mortal sin, living in the friendship of God or cut off from Him. But sooner or later this mortal life, which is our time of probation, comes to an end, and after that there is no change. At the moment of death a man is either in a state of grace or in mortal sin. His will is either directed towards God or turned away from Him. And, as the will is at that moment, so it remains fixed for all eternity.

A man's eternal destiny, therefore, depends entirely on this one thing, whether at the moment of death he is in a state of grace or in a state of mortal sin. In the one case he has within him that divine life which makes him capable of union with God; he is living in God's friendship. In the other case he has not that divine life, and he can never regain it now. His will is turned away from God, it is in enmity against God; and so he must remain eternally separated from God.

THE JUDGEMENT

Sooner or later every one of us must die. Death, of course, is simply the parting of the soul from the body. Nobody knows exactly when the soul leaves the body. We think a man is dead when he stops breathing, or when the heart stops beating. But most theologians think that the soul lingers for some time after that. However that may be, there certainly comes a moment when the soul does definitely leave the body. Now, the first thing that happens after that is

the judgment. In that very instant it is judged. In that instant the fate of the soul is fixed for all eternity.

How exactly will the judgment take place? It is impossible for us to imagine it, or to form any clear picture of it. All pictures drawn from earthly tribunals are beside the mark, for they can only represent the transactions of this material world, and here we are dealing with the judgment of a disembodied spirit. One or two facts, however, are perfectly clear, And first, that the soul, when it leaves the body, will be vividly conscious of the presence of the judge. That is the first thing which the soul will perceive when it leaves the body. We are, indeed, always in God's presence, for in Him we live and move and are, and even in this life we may at times be more or less conscious of that presence. But immediately after death, when all material things have faded from our senses, it will suddenly become far more clear and unmistakable. Only those who are already saints will immediately see Him face to face, but somehow we shall all be made vividly aware of the presence of that Being, whom some have loved and tried to serve constantly all through life, while others have neglected Him, disobeyed Him, or even denied His existence; that Being of infinite power, of awful sanctity, of infinite goodness and mercy, yet infinitely hating sin. And the soul, finding itself in that Presence, will feel itself searched through and through, everything naked and open to His unerring gaze.

All its life will flash before it. Imagine a cinematograph film of your whole life unrolled before you, every deed, every word, every thought faithfully portrayed—everything, the good and the bad, even your most secret thoughts, which were known to none but yourself and God. And that, not gradually, but all in an instant. We have heard stories of something of that kind happening to drowning men, who have been restored to consciousness when life was nearly extinct. Whether that actually happens in such circumstances or not, it will certainly happen the moment after death.

But it is not only all the past that will be unrolled before the newly departed soul. It will see something even more important—namely its present state. It will see itself as it is. And that indeed is the one thing that will supremely matter—not what it has been, but what it is at that moment. For, as we have seen, every man (at least every man who has grown up and come to the full use of reason) is at the moment of death either in a state of grace or in a state of mortal sin. In one way or another grace was offered to him. If he refused it, then he rejected God with his eyes open; he deliberately sinned and destroyed his own soul. And now he will see himself as he is, as by his own sinfulness he has made himself, horrible and loathsome in the sight of God, and now also in his own sight. Throughout his earthly life such a man may have studiously deceived himself, shutting his eyes to the facts. He may have been esteemed and praised by men. Even now they may be singing his praises. Presently they may be having a magnificent funeral, with crowds of mourners, heaps of white flowers on his coffin. But what comfort will that be to the wretched soul, who sees himself as he is in the blazing searchlight of the Divine Presence?

But if, on the other hand, the soul is in a state of grace, then indeed the sight of itself will fill it with joy and astonishment. It will see itself adorned with heavenly beauty, still spotted and stained perhaps in some degree with the remains of sin, but still essentially beautiful, shining with the beauty of God's grace, a reflection of the Uncreated Beauty, that is God Himself.

The judgment, then, will consist in this divine illumination, and this seeing of the facts. We shall see our state, the state which we have reached, and which is now eternally fixed. And, as we recognise our state, in the same instant we shall have entered on that destiny that befits our state. If anyone is then in a state of sin, without grace, without the divine life, he will at once find himself in that place of outer darkness, of eternal separation from God, which is Hell. He, on the other hand, who is in a state of grace, may still be detained for a time in that place of suffering and purification which we call Purgatory. But that is only temporary, for his end is now certain, and there is no possibility of his failing to reach it. Sooner or later he will enter into the unveiled presence of God, into that perfect union with Him and possession of Him, which is Heaven.

There is no doubt that is how the judgment takes place. No need of any apparatus of witnesses, or judge's sentence spoken in words, or literal "sending" to Heaven or to Hell. When such things are spoken of in Holy Scripture, that is all mere imagery, to bring home the reality of it to the imagination. But in fact it will all seem to take place inevitably and, as it were, automatically. So St. Thomas Aquinas explains it. The way he puts it is this. He says that, just as heavy bodies fall by their own weight, and light bodies necessarily rise because of their lightness, so souls that are in sin are carried inevitably by the weight of their sins to Hell, while those that are in grace as inevitably rise to Heaven, unless they are hindered for a time by the remains of sin, which must first be purged away.

Everything depends, then, on this one thing, whether at the moment of death we are in a state of grace or not. And of whether that will be the case or not no one can be certain. So long as we are in the course of this mortal life our end is uncertain. That is why St. Paul bids us “with fear and trembling work out your own salvation.” And again he says, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus.” Let us never, therefore, imagine ourselves to be secure. For, if even St. Paul was not, how can we be? Let us not, indeed, be faint-hearted. Let us have supreme confidence in God’s goodness, that, if only we will do our best, He will supply our deficiencies, He will finish the good work that He has begun in us. Still, we are not at the end yet. And therefore, so long as we are in this world, we have to “press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus.”

HELL

We have now to go a little further into the meaning of those terms, that have so far only been mentioned, Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. And, first, what do we know about Hell? To begin with, we know quite certainly that it exists. Our Lord Himself spoke of it in terrible and unmistakable terms, the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, the Gehenna of fire where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. To deny its existence, therefore, is to deny Christ. It is to make Him a wanton deceiver of the worst kind. It is to accuse Him of frightening us with bogeys, with empty threats of something that has no existence in fact. No, He would not do that. He told us of it, because it is a fact, and because in His love and mercy He would have us warned in time.

But of its exact nature we know little. The chief facts we know are these. First, it is eternal. The soul that has once entered Hell is there for ever. People sometimes ask whether, if a soul in Hell were to repent, it could not at last find forgiveness and release. But the fact is that a soul in Hell cannot repent and does not wish to repent. After death the will is no longer variable, as it is in this life. It is fixed. And the will of the lost soul is fixed in enmity against God. That is the terrible condition to which it has brought itself by its persistence in evil, its constant refusal of the grace of repentance, while repentance was possible, and its final and definite turning away from God. It does not want God. It does not want Heaven. It hates God. And it is precisely this hatred of God, this aversion from God, which separates it eternally from Him. And that eternal separation from God is Hell. This, therefore, is the second fact that we know. Hell is separation from God. It is this separation which constitutes the chief element in the pain of Hell.

This is what is called the “pain of loss.” It is not difficult to understand this. Imagine the unhappy soul which has definitely and finally cut itself off from God by rejecting every offer of God’s grace up to the last moment. So long as it was in this world it was able to find some happiness in the things of sense. But now it has left all that behind. It goes forth utterly alone into a vast solitude, where there is nothing that can make it happy except God. But it is cut off from God. Therefore it can find no source of happiness anywhere. It is driven back upon itself, with nothing to relieve its utter loneliness. And therefore it must be eternally miserable.

In addition to this “pain of loss” there is also something that is called the “pain of sense,” produced by something that is called fire. What the nature of that fire is, and how it acts upon the soul, we do not know. All we can say is that it is some kind of material environment, which confines the soul, restraining its energies, driving it back upon itself, and so producing a pain, which is best represented as the pain of fire.

These are terrible facts to contemplate. But they are facts revealed by God. He has revealed them to us, in His goodness, to warn us. To dwell too much upon the horrors of Hell might easily become morbid. But to ignore it would be unutterable folly. Hell exists, and there is a way that leads to Hell. That is the way of self-indulgence, of carelessness, of worldliness, of neglect of prayer, and especially of pride. All we have to do is to recognise the fact, to take the warning to heart, steadily to set our faces in the opposite direction, and constantly to pray for grace to persevere.

THE LIMBO OF THE INFANTS

Before we go on to consider Purgatory and Heaven, it is well to say a few words about the fate of unbaptised infants. (And with them may perhaps be classed many people who, although they grew up, yet were never sufficiently

morally developed to be capable of mortal sin, for some theologians think that these share the fate of the infants.) Hitherto we have been thinking only of those who have come to the full use of reason, and the knowledge of right and wrong. To them God's grace has been offered, and, if they have rejected it, that is entirely their own fault; for most theologians hold that somehow God offers the possibility of salvation to everyone who comes to the full use of reason. He may not lead them to a knowledge of the Catholic Church. They may even have no chance of baptism, or no knowledge of it. But, necessary as that sacrament is, its place may be taken by the "baptism of desire." That is to say, that if a person desires baptism, and cannot obtain it, God will accept his good will and give him the gift of sanctifying grace without the sacrament. And this desire may be only an implicit desire. If a person has never heard of baptism, but loves God and desires to do whatever God wishes him to do, then he would be baptised if he knew that it was God's will, and so he may be said to have an implicit desire of baptism. And so even the heathen are not left without the possibility of salvation. God offers them grace, and, if they use the grace that He offers, He will give them more grace, and so in some way or another He will provide all that is necessary for their salvation.

But the case of unbaptised infants is different. They have not received the normal baptism of water, and they cannot have the baptism of desire. Therefore there is no way in which they can receive the gift of sanctifying grace. What is to become of them? They can never enter Heaven. That is certain. They are utterly unfit for it. They simply do not possess the supernatural life which alone can make a creature capable of union with God and the supernatural happiness of Heaven. But, on the other hand, they have certainly not sinned, and therefore they will certainly not suffer. Consequently it follows that they must be in some place or state of purely natural happiness, shut out from the vision of God, but not suffering. They do not even suffer from the knowledge that they are excluded from Heaven, any more than we suffer from the knowledge that we are not angels. They have a certain natural knowledge and love of God, and therefore a real natural happiness, with which they are quite contented. To this place of natural happiness is given the name of the Limbo of the Infants. It is to be carefully distinguished from the Limbo of the Patriarchs, that place of rest where the just who died before the coming of our Lord awaited His coming, and to which He Himself went, when He "descended into Hell." That Limbo no longer exists.

Before leaving the subject of Limbo, let us note carefully that in this exclusion of the unbaptised infants from Heaven there is no injustice. They are not deprived of anything to which they have a right. The supernatural happiness of Heaven is a purely gratuitous gift of God, to which no creature can have a right. Therefore, if God leaves the unbaptised infants without that gift, which He has bestowed on others, He does them no wrong, provided that they do not suffer and are quite contented with their state; and we have seen that is the case. And so, although we are bound in charity to secure the baptism of as many dying infants as we can, in order that they may enjoy the happiness of the Beatific Vision, we need not distress ourselves about the fate of those who unhappily die without the sacrament.

PURGATORY

Now let us turn to a happier subject, and consider the destiny of those souls that in the moment of death are found in grace. For them Heaven is certain. Therefore the first thought of such a soul after the judgment is past must be one of intense happiness. It is flooded with thankfulness and joy. For all anxiety and uncertainty and fear are over; the certainty of Heaven lies before it. But for many that happy consummation, though certain, is not immediate. For God has revealed to us that many must first pass through that state of suffering and purification which we call Purgatory. Therefore let us consider now what we know about Purgatory.

First, then, we know that there is a Purgatory, for that has been clearly defined by the Church as a fact revealed by God. That is to say, that there is a place or state in which souls that are saved indeed, but not yet fit for perfect union with God, are purified by suffering. So, for example, the Council of Florence says.. "As to those who have died in the charity of God truly penitent, but before having satisfied for all their sins of commission and omission by worthy fruits of penance, they are purified by purgatorial (or purificatory) pains after death." The reason is obvious. For the man who has sinned, even after he has repented and his sin is forgiven, must still suffer something in order to make satisfaction for his sins. Or, to put it another Way, although the sin is forgiven, there remain stains, or what St. Catherine of Genoa describes as "a sort of rust" upon the soul. And therefore, before the soul is fit to enter the presence of God, these stains of rust must be purged away by willingly accepted suffering. That may, of course, be

done partly, or even completely, in this world, by “bringing forth fruits of penance,” by good works, or by the willing acceptance of such suffering as comes upon us by the Providence of God. But, if the process is not complete when death comes, then it must be completed in the next world in Purgatory.

So much we know for certain. But what of the nature of that suffering? Of that we know less. It is a common opinion that, in part at least, the instrument of it is some kind of fire. This has been gathered from the words of St. Paul, that some “shall be saved, yet so as by fire.” But this is not certain, for it has never been defined. And, if there is some kind of fire in Purgatory, we certainly know nothing of the nature or the effects of it. But, in any case, there is no doubt that the chief cause of suffering in Purgatory must be the intense unsatisfied longing of those poor souls to see God and to be united to Him. For in the moment after death the soul, as we have seen, is vividly conscious of God. It receives a knowledge of Him far clearer than anyone can have in this world. It realises His infinite goodness and beauty and loveliness as it has never done before. And therefore, if it is in grace, its love of God and desire for God becomes far more intense, beyond all that we can imagine now.

And then the soul looks at itself, and looks back over its past. It remembers all that it has done to offend this infinitely loving and lovable God. It realises the horribleness and vileness of those sins as never before. It sees how it has stained and defiled itself with them, and how utterly unworthy it is to enter into that glorious presence, and how therefore it must be shut out for a time, until those stains have been completely purged away. And so it remains mourning and sorrowing, waiting for the barrier to be removed, which shuts it out from the presence of Him whom it loves. It is difficult for us to realise how intense that suffering is. That is because our love for God is so faint and feeble. We cannot understand the minds of those poor souls in Purgatory, who love Him so intensely that to be shut out from His presence even for a time causes the acutest mental anguish. Moreover, they have nothing to distract them. Here in this world, even if we have some faint desire and longing for God at times, we have all kinds of other things to occupy our thoughts, to satisfy us partly, and to distract us from that desire. There they have nothing to distract them. The soul’s whole thought is concentrated on God alone, in an intense longing for Him. It has only one desire, and that desire unsatisfied. “My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the presence of God?” That is its one continual thought, “When shall I come and appear before the presence of God?”

But another fact about Purgatory is also certain that in the midst of all their suffering, deep down, underlying it all, those holy souls have an intense happiness. That seems paradoxical, but it is true. They are suffering intensely, but they have also a profound joy in their suffering. That is why Cardinal Newman in the *Dream of Gerontius* makes the Angel Guardian speak of the soul, as it sinks into Purgatory, as “happy suffering soul.” St. Catherine of Genoa says that, although the suffering of the poor souls in Purgatory is more intense than anything that we can suffer in this world, yet at the same time their happiness is greater than any that we can know here. And after all this is not so difficult to understand, if you have ever seen some really holy person suffering from a long and painful illness. You know how much he is suffering. And yet you have seen, and wondered to see, how happy he is through it all. He suffers happily, because he is so filled with the love of God, so conscious of God’s love through it all. He unites his sufferings with those of Our Lord in His Passion, and rejoices to be able thus to accomplish His will. So, then, the Holy Souls in Purgatory are happy in their suffering. They are happy, first of all, because their salvation is assured. They are free for ever from all anxiety, all fear, all temptation, all those unruly desires which torment us in this life, all possibility of sin. Their future is certain, that glorious future of union with God. And that is a far greater joy to them than it could be to us now, even if we were certain of it, which we can never be in this world, because they know so much better what it means; knowing God as they do, they have a far more intense realisation of the meaning of the joy to come.

Again, they are happy, because they suffer willingly for the love of God. They love God so much that they are necessarily happy in doing His will, however painful it may be to themselves. And they rejoice to see the effects of that cleansing process. The soul in Purgatory is like a sick man who feels himself daily growing stronger and returning to health. It sees those stains of rust being gradually cleansed away. And, as the cleansing goes on, so their union with God grows daily more and more intimate, and nearer and nearer they see the day approaching, when at last their longing will be fulfilled, and they will see God face to face.

Yet another fact about Purgatory we know, and it is one that is a source of consolation to us. That is, that we can help the poor souls who are there by our prayers, by our good works offered to God for them, by trying to gain indulgences for them, and especially by having Masses said and joining in the offering of Masses for them. By all these means we can help them, console them, and shorten the time of their waiting. And there is no more charitable work that we can do than that. Think of all those poor souls, suffering, longing for God. What a joy to them to know that someone on earth has prayed for them, or a Mass has been said for them, and thereby the time of suffering is shortened, and the blessed vision of God is so much nearer. Let us always pray, then, and join in the offering of Masses for the Holy Souls; for our own friends, for those we have known and loved on earth, and for the millions unknown, especially for those that are most neglected, who have no friends on earth to pray for them.

And let us never be so foolish as to conclude that any friend of ours, however good he may have been, has no need of prayers and Masses, under the impression that he must have gone straight to Heaven. It may be so, and it is no doubt very charitable to think it must be so. But we must remember that we never know, and it is no real kindness to our friend to jump to that conclusion. No one but God knows of any soul what further need it had of purification when death came, for God alone can see into the hearts of men. Let us put the matter in this way. Suppose you were to die tonight. Would you like us all to say, "Oh, he was so good, that he must have gone straight to Heaven; so we need not bother to pray or to have Masses said for him?" No you would not. Then do not treat your friends like that. It may be very flattering to say that about them, but they do not care about flattery in the next world. And you will look rather foolish if, when you meet them in the next world, they tell you that because of your flattering opinion of them they have had to suffer much longer than they might have done if only you had prayed and had Masses said for them.

But now another question arises. We cannot help asking it. Do the souls in Purgatory know what passes on earth? Do our friends there know what is happening to us? And can they help us by their prayers? Now, this is a question on which nothing has ever been defined by the Church, and therefore we cannot be quite certain about the answer. There is no doubt, of course, about the souls in Heaven, for they can see all things in God. But so long as they are still in Purgatory it is not absolutely certain. But all theologians are agreed that it is most probable. And so practically we can feel sure that the Holy Souls in Purgatory do pray for us, and that they do know even now what goes on earth, so far as it concerns them; and that therefore they do know what happens to their friends, can follow our lives with loving interest, and help us by their prayers.

There, then, in outline, is what we know of Purgatory. And what a beautiful and consoling doctrine it is that God has thus given us! For, if there were no Purgatory, how many of us could have any hope of Heaven? Suppose you were to die tomorrow. You may have a reasonable hope that you will die in the grace of God with your sins forgiven. But have you lived so pure and holy a life, or have you already made such complete satisfaction for your sins, that you are fit to go straight to Heaven? Not one of us would dare to say so.

Then, if there were no Purgatory, what would become of us? How could we ever get to Heaven? So indeed it is a great consolation to know that God in His mercy has made that provision for our purification. And, again, what a comfort it is to know that we can still do something for our friends who are gone. How inexpressibly dreary is the Protestant doctrine that they are absolutely cut off from us, that we can do nothing for them, and they can do nothing for us! Oh, no, God is kinder than that! We all want to do something for those whom we love, and who are gone before us. And God in His goodness gives us the power. We can still help them, and they are grateful for our help and help us in return.

HEAVEN

Every soul that departs from the body in a state of grace must eventually reach Heaven. It may be immediately, or it may be after a period, short or long, of purification in Purgatory. Now, what do we know about Heaven? Certainly we can form no very clear idea of what it is like. It is utterly beyond our power to imagine it. As St. Paul said long ago, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." We cannot see, we cannot hear, we cannot imagine the joys of Heaven, because they are utterly beyond anything of which we have any experience in this world. And yet God has revealed certain facts about it.

First, then, Heaven is a place of rest, of perfect happiness, of complete satisfaction. That is so because there the

soul has reached its goal. It is at the end of its journey. It is, as the theologians say, *in termino*. Here we are “*in via*,” on the way. That is why here we are never at rest. We can never be completely satisfied. There is always something more to be desired. Therefore our life is restless, a constant seeking of something new, something more satisfying. Even death does not necessarily bring rest. People sometimes speak in a general way of the dead as being at rest. But they are not necessarily at rest. The souls in Hell are certainly not at rest, and never will be. Even the souls in Purgatory are not yet at rest. That is why we continue to pray for them, “*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine*”—“eternal rest give unto them, O Lord.” The souls in Purgatory are still restless, because they are still unsatisfied, still waiting for the consummation of their joy. No, it is only when the soul has reached Heaven that it is at rest, because then it has reached its goal. This rest, however, does not mean inactivity, idleness, or stagnation. That could never be a state of happiness. Perfect happiness was defined long ago by Aristotle as a perfect activity. And that is the life of Heaven. It is intense activity, but a restful, peaceful activity, without effort, strain, or weariness. The soul is at rest, because it is perfectly satisfied. It has no fear, no anxiety, no unsatisfied desire.

But what is it that so completely satisfies the soul in Heaven? It is no created object, but God Himself. The soul is satisfied because it possesses God, the infinite Good. We must not think of the happiness of Heaven as the possession of one finite object of happiness after another, a mere never ending succession of finite joys. That would not be complete satisfaction, because it would leave always something more to be desired. Heaven is not that. It is the complete possession, all at once and eternally, of the infinite Source of all happiness, which is God Himself. Nothing less could satisfy the immense capacity for happiness of the human soul.

In Heaven we shall possess God. That is to say that we shall be perfectly united with Him in mind and will, in knowledge and in love. We are told that in Heaven we shall “see” God. “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.” “We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.” Indeed this “Beatific Vision” of God is often spoken of as the essential happiness of Heaven. Of course this does not mean that we shall see Him with our bodily eyes. That is manifestly impossible, for God is a Spirit and invisible. Moreover, the Saints in Heaven now, with the exception of our Blessed Lady, have no bodily eyes, and will have none until the resurrection in the last day, and yet they certainly enjoy the Beatific Vision. No, it is an intellectual vision, a vision of the mind. We get a little nearer the fact, if we consider how we grasp ideas with the mind. We often speak of that purely intellectual process as “seeing.” We “see” things with the mind when we grasp them intellectually. But that falls very far short of the way in which we shall apprehend God in the Beatific Vision. For it is not the mere idea of God that we shall grasp, but God Himself. We cannot understand that now, because we have not the necessary faculty. In Heaven it will be possible because of what is called the “*Lumen Gloria*”, the Light of Glory. That is a supernatural gift, which the Saints have in Heaven, and which so raises the powers of the soul that it is able to perceive God directly, without bodily eyes and without the help even of any ideas. It does not see God outside itself, but within the very substance of its own being. It finds God in itself, and itself in God, so that it knows Him, as it were, from within the depths of His own Being.

To see God! How can we get some notion of what that means? In this world we dimly perceive a few of God’s works. We are delighted by the innumerable beauties of form and colour and sound, the glories of nature, of art, of music. Still higher is the intellectual happiness, when we explore and grasp with the mind some of the hidden secrets of nature. As we explore further and further, we are lost in admiration at the wonders of God’s works. And a higher happiness still, for those who are capable of it, is to Contemplate purely abstract truth, to try to grasp something of the hidden truth that lies behind the things that appear to the senses. But all these things are mere dim reflections of the uncreated, infinite Being of God, who is the Source of them all. He is the plenitude of Being, Being itself, comprising in Himself all Truth and all Beauty, or rather He is Himself all Truth and all Beauty. What must be the joy of seeing Him as He is in that unimaginable intimacy of the Beatific Vision!

But this union of mind with Mind implies something further. It implies a perfect union of love, a union of perfect friendship. It was said by God in the beginning that “it is not good for man to be alone.” We know how true that is. We cannot live in loneliness, in isolation. Our nature requires that we enter into relations of love and friendship with others. That constitutes our chief source of happiness in this world. And yet it is in this that we are never completely satisfied. There is no friendship in the world which is completely and lastingly satisfying. In the best of friends there is

always something wanting, and, even if we could find a perfect friend, perfect union with him would be impossible. There is always a large part of our inner life, which we must live alone, which we can share with no human being.

But all that is wanting here we shall find in Heaven in God. For there God will give Himself to us in the most real and intimate friendship. It is an overwhelming thought, that God Himself, the infinite God; should be our Friend. But it is true. God will give Himself to us without reserve, and we shall give ourselves without reserve to Him. We shall be united in so perfect a love that we shall, as it were, lose ourselves in Him. We must, however, beware here of the idea found in many Eastern mystics, that we shall be so absorbed in God as to lose our own individuality and personality. That is not the case. We shall keep our own individuality. But, short of losing that, it is impossible to exaggerate the closeness of the union between God and the soul in Heaven.

People sometimes ask whether we shall find and recognise our earthly friends in Heaven. Certainly we shall. There is no doubt about that. We shall find them in God, for in God we shall find everything that is necessary to our happiness. And not only shall we know them, but we shall know them in a far more intimate way than was ever possible here. We shall find them free from all imperfections, and we shall have far more intimate union with them. And not only shall we and those whom we have known and loved here on earth, but a host of other friends. First and above all Will be Jesus Christ our Lord in His Sacred Humanity. For He remains Man as well as God eternally, and will be in Heaven for ever the centre of redeemed humanity, our glorious King, but also the most intimate Friend of every one. We have known something of that loving friendship even here on earth, possessing Him, as we do, in the Blessed Sacrament. But how much more wonderful to see Him face to face in His glory, and to live for ever in His love! Then there will be the Blessed Mother of God, that gracious, tender Mother, whom we have learnt to love so dearly, though as yet we have never seen her face. Second only to her Son, she will be the unspeakable joy of all who have learnt to love her on earth. And then all the holy Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins—all those holy men and women, known and unknown, all will be our friends and loving companions there. We shall find them and love them all in God.

THE CONSUMMATION

When the soul has reached Heaven, it has reached its goal. It has found perfect and eternal satisfaction. But a soul without a body is not a complete human being. Consequently, as God has revealed to us, there is some day to be a resurrection of the body. When this world has run its course, Our Lord will return, as He plainly said, for the Last judgment. There will be a general resurrection of the dead. That is to say that the bodies which we lost in death will be restored to us, so that we shall again be completed human beings. Then will take place the Last judgment, or the General judgment, as it is also called, to distinguish it from the Particular judgement of each soul, which takes place, as we have seen, the moment after death. People sometimes wonder, if each soul is judged at death, what need there is of the General judgment. Several reasons may be assigned. One reason is that, as a man is not only a private individual, but also a member of the human race, so it is fitting that after each man has been judged separately there should be a general judgment of the human race as a whole. The Particular judgment is the judgment of the individual; the General judgment is the judgment of Mankind as a whole. And, again, it seems necessary for the full manifestation of God's justice. The first judgment, of each individual was private. There must, therefore, also be a public judgment, in which the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the justice of God made manifest to all.

But what of the nature of the bodies that we hope to have in Heaven after the Resurrection? We shall rise again with our own bodies, the same bodies that we have now. So much is of faith. But it is also certain that these bodies will be greatly changed. They will not necessarily consist of the same particles of matter as compose them now, for the identity of the body does not depend upon the identity of the matter composing it. That is clear enough, since the matter in our bodies is continually changing even in this life. And that disposes of a number of superficial difficulties about the same matter having possibly formed part of several bodies.

It is also clear that the body will be changed in many other ways, since our bodies, as they are now, are not fitted for an eternal existence. St. Paul says that "it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." This cannot mean that it has the nature of a spirit, but rather that it is completely subject to the spirit. It will be free from suffering, from corruption, and from all the natural necessities of this life, and endowed with a supernatural beauty and glory, sharing

in the glory of the glorified soul. But more than that we can hardly say, since the conditions of that eternal life are so utterly beyond our experience.

After the Last judgment there will be no more change. This earth will have passed away. Purgatory will have ceased to be. Only Heaven and Hell will remain. There will be no more change and no more time, but only Eternity. Sometimes here the thought will occur: shall we, then, not get tired of the happiness of Heaven? That is one of our difficulties, that we cannot imagine a happiness which never pass, of which we shall never grow weary throughout eternity. How is it that this will not happen? The first reason is that it is a complete and perfect satisfaction of all our desires. We grow weary of every earthly happiness simply because it is not perfect, it is not completely satisfying. That is why we always desire some other object of happiness, something that will give us what was wanting in the last object. But in Heaven that cannot be so, because the Object of our happiness there is God Himself, who is infinitely perfect, and can leave nothing more to be desired. And the second reason is, that of that infinite Object we can never reach the end. Through all eternity we shall always find some new beauty, some new goodness, some new satisfaction. It is true that we shall grasp and possess Him all at once and completely, to the utmost capacity of our nature. And yet, just because He is infinite and we are finite, we shall in some wonderful way find Him always new, we shall see in Him new goodness and new beauty. He is "beauty ever ancient and ever new."

And, again, the joy of Heaven will never pall, just because it is so utterly unselfish. It is sometimes supposed that the Heaven to which we look forward is a mere selfish enjoyment. In fact, it is quite the contrary. We have already seen that rest in Heaven does not imply inactivity, but the very reverse. It is difficult for us to understand this, because it is a kind of activity different from any that most of us are accustomed to practice in this life. The nearest approach to it is found in that state of infused contemplation which some of the mystics have tried to describe. All the ordinary powers of the mind, imagination, and reason are suspended. But the soul itself is intensely active, absorbed in contemplation. Something akin to that, but far more perfect, must be the activity of the soul in Heaven. And it is not selfish, but just the opposite because the soul absorbed in God has forgotten itself. It is utterly selfless. The very essence of its happiness lies in this, that it has ceased to think of itself, it has no desire of its own, but lives only to give glory to God. In Heaven we shall at last understand that perfect happiness consists in forgetting ourselves, in living not for ourselves, but solely for God, giving ourselves to Him, losing ourselves in Him, living only to love Him, to adore Him, to give Him the glory that is His due.
