

“But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty too is our preaching; empty, too, your faith...But Christ has been raised.”

-1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20



The Resurrection, Andrea del Castagno (1447)

*“I am not dying;
I am entering life.”
St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

*“For me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain.”
St. Paul*

LIFE IS CHANGED, NOT ENDED

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Most Americans believe in some kind of life-after-death. The conversation really gets going though, when we start to talk about what we think the afterlife looks like. The Gospels reveal to us a few teachings about the after-life that—far from constraining our human desires—expand our hearts and awaken our imaginations.

One of these teachings includes the belief that our bodies will be reunited with our souls at the Final Judgment. Mary’s Assumption, body and soul into heaven, prefigures this process. The resurrection of the body helps us to see a fundamental feature of heaven: namely, that in heaven the human person is totally fulfilled and perfected. When our bodies are resurrected, they are glorified: the same body, but made anew. St. Paul tells us, “He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body” (Philippians 3:21). In contrast to the Eastern religions and philosophies (such as Buddhism and Hinduism), our personalities do not melt away into the Great All. Rather, they are perfected so that we may experience the ultimate fulfillment of a life with God.

In heaven, we shall see God face to face (1 John 3:2) and be bathed in the light of his radiance. In heaven there will be no more tears or night (Revelation 22). The pain of this life will have passed away—our glorified bodies will not suffer—for in heaven we behold God who, “makes all things new.” (Revelation 21:5). Since our 80, 90 or even 100 years here (if we are so blessed to live that long) will seem as nothing compared to eternity, “this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17).

Because the joys of this life are fleeting, it can be hard to imagine the joy of heaven. The happiness of heaven will never become monotonous or dreary, because God is infinite. Just being in God’s presence will be a non-stop thrill, satisfying our every desire. There is nothing greater in the universe than God, and nothing less than being with him will make us happy. As St. Paul reminds us, “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, ... [it] has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

“In him the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.”

The Roman Missal

DYING WITH CHRIST

In order to live with Christ, we must first die with him. For Christians this happens sacramentally when we are first brought into the life of the faith at baptism. Water, which often symbolizes life, can be a sign of death, too. For example, the ancient world saw the sea as a home for chaos. The waters of baptism which represent new life in Christ, also show the means this life is given to us: the mystery of the cross.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, death has been transformed.

Instead of being the end of existence, death has been rendered merely the end of earthly life. In all the sacraments, we receive these graces of Christ, but we receive them in a particular way at baptism.

By baptism we become united to the Church, by being incorporated into Christ. Through baptism we are joined in a spiritual way even more deeply to our baptized family and friends. In this way baptism also foreshadows the future glory of heaven, where all the faithful will be reunited in God.

Our present works of love speak even now of our belief in the coming resurrection of the dead. Christians have for centuries diligently cared for the sick and suffering partly because of our view of the sacredness of the body. The life and works of Mother Teresa make little sense apart from the context of Christian beliefs about the afterlife. Christian burial also shows a great reverence for the body. We honor the remains of our loved ones, desiring to provide for them fitting burials. As St. Augustine says, "Care for the bodies of our dead is an affirmation of our firm belief in the resurrection." Just as we treat the former possessions of our dearly departed with reverence and respect, so too do we treat their bodies.

After our loved ones have died, we often feel close to them when we visit their tombs. Likewise, it has been a long-standing custom of Christians to reverence the relics of the saints and martyrs. When we reverence the bones of a holy person, that person is made present to us in a particular way, because the body is more than an incidental or external case in which the soul is stored. The body is not a thing that can be disposed of and forgotten—in a mysterious way the soul needs the body. Again, as Augustine says, "Only when the soul...again receives its body...will it have the perfect measure of its being." When the soul is joined to the body, we are fully ourselves, thus only when the soul is united to a glorified body will the entire person experience perfect joy.



The Baptism of Christ, Joachim Patinir (1510-1520).

“The person is not the soul. The human person is a composite of soul and body...and unless there is soul and body, there can be no perfect joy,” says St. Bonaventure. **The Christian tradition has for centuries upheld the dignity of the body. What Christianity has bequeathed civilization is not—as some suppose—shame for the body. Authentic Christian teaching boldly repeats, time and again, that we are unities of matter and spirit, body and soul. Neither the soul nor body alone is the totality of the person.**

During the Month of November, a time when the Church remembers in a particular way those who have gone before us in death, these inserts are made available with the aim of presenting anew Catholic beliefs on the sacred goal of life: attaining the Kingdom of Heaven.

