

“...like the angels... they are the children of God, for they are the ones who will rise.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time, in the wallet of a dead soldier, this note was found:

“I am standing upon the seashore.

*A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean.
She is an object of beauty and strength. And I stand and watch her, until at length,
she is only a ribbon of white cloud, just where the sea and sky mingle with each other.*

Then, someone at my side says, ‘There! She’s gone.’

Gone? —gone where? Gone from my sight—that’s all.

*She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side.
And just as able to bear her load of living freight—to the place of destination.*

Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

*And, just at that moment, when someone at my side says, ‘There! She’s gone,’
there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout,*

‘There! She Comes!’

And that—is--dying.”

That rather poetic description of death fits well with the Bible’s teaching on death. Death is not the end of living. It is merely a change in living. Our immortal soul, our essence, infused by Almighty God at the moment of conception, separated from the body in death, lives on—for all eternity! It (death) is the beginning of the life God ultimately had in mind for us when he created us.

*The Bible is absolutely clear on the fact of life after death. **BUT**, the Bible is less clear on what life after death is like.*

“How does the Bible talk about life after death?” you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

It talks about it, life after death, in general terms.

*We see that, for example, in today’s Scripture readings. Take the Gospel reading, which I just read to you from Luke. Jesus affirms the existence of afterlife, **BUT**, he does not say what it is like.*

Elsewhere Jesus speaks of two different states in the afterlife: heaven and hell.

Ist, heaven:

In John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of heaven as being ‘eternal life,’ saying:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” Jn.6:51

&

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” Mt.25:41

And so, Jesus speaks of heaven in general terms. It is a state in which we share in his life forever. Now, listen to what Paul says of heaven:

“What eye has not seen & ear has not heard & what has not entered the human heart (IS) what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit” 1Cor.2:9-10

2nd hell:

Look to where Jesus speaks about the sheep and the goats. He says that, at the last judgment, people will be divided into two groups. To the one group, the King says:

**“Come, you who are blessed by my Father.
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”** Mt.25:34

To the other group, the King says:

“Depart from me...into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!” Mt.25:41

This makes it clear that hell is eternal separation from God. It clearly talks about fire, **BUT** this cannot be fire in a physical sense, because it's talking about a spiritual reality, where there is no physical body. After death, the remaining body is only our 'shell' and that's at the cemetery!

Be that as it may, the impression we carry away is absolutely clear. We should avoid the state of eternal separation from God as rigorously as we would avoid having our body cast into fire for all eternity. The 'fire analogy' is perfectly clear: hell would be as painful to our soul as fire would be to our body.

At any rate, Jesus affirms the existence of hell, **BUT** he describes this state only in general terms.

Finally, there's a **3rd** state in the afterlife called purgatory. It is a state of purgation or cleansing. There is an insightful remark about purgatory in James Boswell's famous biography of Samuel Johnson, the great British writer. When Boswell asks Johnson his opinion of the Catholic teaching about purgatory, Johnson surprises him by saying that the teaching makes excellent sense.

His reasoning is that most people who die are not so bad to deserve hell, say like a Hitler, and not so good as to deserve immediate entry into heaven, say like a Mother Theresa of Calcutta. So, there must be an intermediate state where some sort of purgation takes place.

When asked about praying for those in purgatory, Johnson says it's as proper to pray for them, as it is to pray for our brothers and sisters who are still alive.

Incidentally, in all this, Johnson echoes the teaching of the Church on praying for the deceased and the Book of Maccabees, where a man is praised for offering sacrifice ... **“that the dead may be freed from their sins.”** (2 Mac.12:43-46)

The popular movie, The Heavenly Kid, was based on this very theme. After his death in a car wreck, a man is sent back to earth from a place called 'Midtown' to work off the evil he committed during his life.

In short, purgatory is a state that purifies and prepares us for entry into eternal life.

And this brings us back to my starting point in today's Gospel.

Jesus affirms the existence of life after death. **BUT**, he describes it only in general terms.

For a clear knowledge of what life after death is like, I am afraid we will have to wait until we experience it firsthand after our own death. This is merely the pathway of all human existence. If we have lived a decent life and learned from our mistakes, cherishing the wonderful gifts Jesus has given to us through his Church, it will be a time of wonder and immeasurable peace & joy with family and other loved ones, who have preceded us in crossing the final threshold of death. I do not see this as morbid or frightening, **BUT**... as part of a divine promise, full of hope & awe! I now conclude by quoting, again, St. Paul concerning heaven. It is a beautiful summation of our faith and hope concerning life after death:

**“What eye has not seen and ear has not heard and what has not entered the human heart
(IS) what God has prepared for those who love him.”** 1 Cor.2:9-10

May that very same God, our Abba, bless you—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.