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The Four Last Things – Heaven (Part 4)

Last week we considered the third of the four last things, the eternal truths as we examined hell. The existence of hell and its eternity is a hard and fast teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those souls who die in a state of mortal sin without repentance descend into hell. This week we consider the lot of those souls who having persevered in the Lord's love and law enjoy in the end.

As one contemporary author sums it up:

“Heaven is our goal, plain and simple. This is the culmination of our Faith: God has created us to share eternal communion with Him. He desires our salvation.”¹

But what will heaven be like we might wonder? Asking a group of children at my last assignment this question they offered any number of answers. It will involve, according to these little ones, ice cream, toys and even a beloved pet dog or two. To each in turn we have to respond: ***“It's even better!”***

St. Paul helps us to appreciate just how much better heaven is than anything we can imagine as he writes: ***“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”²*** Trying to comprehend what this end means is a necessary activity of any serious believer's life. The exercise of trying to conceive this end God has held out to us only inspire us to greater and greater desire that we might attain this end its fullness.

Fundamentally to be in heaven is to be with God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit for all eternity. When Jesus Christ speaks to us of Salvation from sin it is with this particular end of perfect and lasting communion in mind. Mired in the world in which we live it can be hard to comprehend what that end will look like or even why such a life is eminently attractive. We tend to see the bodily pleasures sought here and now as the end all and be all of man's longing, however there is a higher joy prepared for him in accord with his being created in the image and likeness of God.

St. Robert Bellarmine reminds us that our true and lasting happiness is only found in the pursuit of this particular end. He teaches:

“If you are wise, then, know that you have been created for the glory of God and your own eternal salvation. This is your goal; this is the center of your life; this is the treasure of your heart. If you reach this goal, you will find happiness. If you fail to reach it, you will find misery.”³

¹ Menezes, Fr. Wade . The Four Last Things: A Catechetical Guide to Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell (Kindle Locations 818-819). EWTN Publishing, Inc. . Kindle Edition.

² 1 Cor 2:9

³ Menezes, Fr. Wade . The Four Last Things: A Catechetical Guide to Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell (Kindle Locations 843-846). EWTN Publishing, Inc. . Kindle Edition.

It was with this goal in mind that countless saints and martyrs sought to share the gift of salvation with peoples both near and far. It is the truth of heaven that drove such persons to the far-off missions to make disciples of all nations baptizing and teaching the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ. The more enraptured we become by way of our frequent reflection upon heaven, our true end, the more committed we will become to pursuing first for ourselves and then for all those around us. ~Fr. Matthew Biedrzycki