

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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A JUBILEE YEAR AT LOURDES

In 1858, from February 11 until April 7, the Blessed Virgin appeared eighteen times to Bernadette Subirous, at Lourdes, a village in southern France. The Mother of God finally led Bernadette to a grotto where she uncovered a spring of water. Then, as now, the spring produces 27,000 gallons of water a day. This is not a vast amount, but for one hundred fifty years this water has been a sign and the means of God's healing love.

Eight years after experiencing her visions, Bernadette left Lourdes and never returned. She entered a convent of nursing sisters and fourteen years later, at the age of thirty-five, she died. One of her biographers notes "in all the grand doings of the consecration of the basilica above the grotto and other splendid functions she had no part or share." A greater surprise, perhaps, is that Bernadette, who was the means of restoring so many others to health, herself suffered intensely and died in great pain.

Surprise is an element whenever we celebrate a feast of the Virgin Mary. Mary takes our place in the gospel, so whenever we encounter her we share her astonishment that God should choose to save us by the untidy process of taking on our human nature. Yet that is the whole point of Lourdes and its miraculous water — that no matter how often creation has disappointed God, God has never given up on creation. God took on our flesh so that what led us astray might lead us back to salvation. The Incarnation charges every atom of the created universe with God's divinity. The water at Lourdes is a special vehicle of God's grace, but it is also a sign of the entire created world's incredible vocation to proclaim God's power and love.

The Holy Father has announced two Plenary Indulgences to celebrate the anniversary of Our Lady's apparition at Lourdes. The first is available to those able to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes and visit the sites associated with St. Bernadette. The second is far more general. The Pope's document declares,

If between February 2, 2008 [the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord] and February 11, 2008, Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes...



OUR LADY OF LOURDES
Silhouette by Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P.

[the faithful] visit any church, grotto or decorous place, the blessed image of that same Virgin of Lourdes, solemnly exposed for public veneration, and before the image participate in a pious exercise of Marian devotion, or at least pause for an appropriate space of time in prayer and with pious meditation, concluding with the recital of the Our Father, the Profession of Faith, and the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The indulgence is also granted to those who "through sickness, old age or other legitimate reason are unable to leave their homes." These individuals must "with the soul completely removed from attachment to any form of sin...on the days February 2 to 11, 2008, in their hearts...spiritually visit" the holy places of Lourdes and pray the Our Father, the Creed, and the Hail Mary, "trustingly offering to God, through Mary, the sickness and discomforts of their lives." Anyone who wishes to receive the indulgence must also receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and offer prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father.

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Creed, Part X

The Resurrection of the Body, and Life Everlasting

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

“By a man came death,” St. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth, *“and by a man came the resurrection of the dead”* (1 Cor. 15:21). As St. Thomas Aquinas drew his Lenten reflections on the Creed to an end, he considered the four-fold benefit we derive from the Resurrection.

A REMEDY FOR SORROW AND FEAR

St. Augustine reminds us that those who are alive naturally shrink from death. Death is the opposite of everything we experience in our lives, so we fear death, and we are understandably stricken when we consider our own death, or face the death of someone we love.

St. Paul, one of the world’s great psychologists, addressed our sorrow at the death of others when he wrote, *“We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope* (1 Thess. 4:13). Faith in the Resurrection cannot remove the sorrow we feel in the face of death, but our hope that the dead will rise again makes Christian grief different from the sorrow of an unbeliever.

Moreover, by reminding us that we look forward to another, better life, our faith in the Resurrection helps dispel some of the fear we feel at the prospect of our own death. Christian prayer and Scripture encourage and reinforce this faith.

The Letter to the Hebrews is filled with insight into the Incarnation. Among the reasons Jesus took on our flesh, the letter says, is *“...that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage”* (Heb. 2:14,15). In one of the prefaces for funeral Masses the Church prays, *“Lord, for your faithful people, life is changed not ended....”* Change is an unavoidable part of our lives. Faith in the Resurrection helps us see death as one more change, but by no means the last – and certainly not a fearsome one.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO DO GOOD

St. Thomas is always a realist; he understood that rewards exert a powerful effect on human behavior. If we did not look forward to an eternal life, he argues, we would have little incentive to do good in this life. This argument is not based on a cynical proposition that we behave properly on earth simply to inherit everlasting life, but on a realization that something beyond what we can see gives meaning to what we do.

This means that while our actions may be good or bad in themselves, they receive additional character from the reason for which we perform them. If we looked forward

to nothing more than our present existence, our actions would be determined by whatever we might find attractive (or unattractive) at any particular moment. Belief in the Resurrection allows us to conduct ourselves on earth in the same way we look forward to living in heaven. This belief not only encourages virtuous behavior, but invests our actions here and now with some of the glory of eternity.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO AVOID EVIL

The hope of everlasting life is a powerful incentive to do good; the threat of punishment is a similarly powerful inducement to avoid evil. Our Savior promises an hour when *“those who have done good [will rise] to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment”* (John 5:29).

Every child knows that the threat of punishment is ample reason for fulfilling a parent’s wishes. But as we grow older, we realize that choosing good does more than enable us to escape punishment. As we progress in our moral lives, grace strengthens us to choose good for its own sake – and so we may act more and more like the God in whose image we have been created. But in moments of severe temptation, the fear of judgment may steer us away from bad choices.

THE RISEN BODY

The Angelic Doctor preached that since the body is an essential part of who we are and what we do on earth, the identity, quality, integrity and age that characterize the risen bodies of the blessed will add to the glory and joy of the just. Likewise, these same qualities will be an additional source of sorrow for those condemned to eternal punishment.

THE IDENTITY OF THE BODY

The Church’s faith in the resurrection of the body is based on Scripture, in which we read (in the Old Testament), *“I shall be clothed again in my skin; and in my flesh I shall see God”* (Job 19:26), and (in the New Testament), *“the corruptible must put on incorruption”* (1 Cor. 15:33). The same body that serves us and identifies us on earth, will continue to be a part of our everlasting life.

THE QUALITY OF THE RISEN BODY

Many non-Christians maintain that death puts a final end to our human existence, or that the soul alone survives death. The Old Testament book of Job provides an eloquent expression of this belief. *“As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to [the netherworld] returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him any more”* (Job 7:10).

By contrast, the Christian belief in the resurrection teaches that an individual's physical body will be reconstituted after death, and reunited with the individual's soul. However, this body will no longer be subject to decay. Moreover, the blessed will no longer be affected by hunger or sexual desire. Rather, as Our Savior promises, "*in the resurrection they will... be as the angels in heaven*" (Matt. 22:30).

THE INTEGRITY OF THE BODY

Age, hunger and disease are among the many forces that can disfigure our bodies or limit their capacity for action. The risen body will have no imperfections, and because "*the dead shall rise again incorruptible*" (1 Cor. 15:52), the risen body will be immune to the forces that limit, impede, or prevent our bodily activity on earth.

This is true of the bodies of the blessed no less than those condemned to eternal punishment. This perfection will be a source of everlasting joy to the just who endured the effects of weakness and disease in life; we must conclude that this perfection will be an additional source of pain to the damned.

THE AGE OF THE RISEN BODY

Scripture and Tradition tell us that Jesus was about thirty years old when He embraced the cross for our salvation. St. Thomas (cf., *ST*, supplement, 81.1), influenced by St. Augustine, preached that since Our Savior sets all the standards for perfection, His age at the time of His death and Resurrection must be the ideal age for every human body at its own resurrection. Thus, in the resurrection, children will receive what they lacked at the time of their death, and the aged will receive back whatever they lost to old age or illness.

THE BODIES OF THE BLESSED

St. Paul wrote, "*the just shall shine as the sun in their Father's kingdom*" (Matt 13:43) so those who rise to eternal life will be blessed with an additional brightness. Their bodies will suffer none of the sorrow, pain, fear or grief that our bodies are subject to in their present state. Likewise, the bodies of the blessed will be strong, and (unlike our present bodies) they will be subject to the spirit. St. Thomas calls these qualities clarity, impassibility, agility, and subtlety.

THE BODIES OF THE DAMNED

Those condemned to everlasting punishment will take with them bodies that are whole and complete. However, St. Thomas warns, these bodies will lack the bright luster of the bodies of the just, they will be subject to pain (although not to destruction), and weighed down as if the soul were chained to the body. The bodies of the blessed will be glorified by the splendor of their souls; the souls of the damned will be stained, and their glory obscured, by the sinfulness of the body.

EVERLASTING LIFE

God and God's love are (or should be) the reason for everything we do. Thus, the hope of eternal life with God gives its unique character to all our actions, for

all our actions have in mind the eternal union with God we hope for. Some deny the possibility of eternal life, saying that the human soul dies with the body, but the Scripture assures us, "*... God created man incorruptible, and to the image of His own likeness He made him*" (Wisdom 2:22-23). As he draws his sermons on the Creed to a close, the Angelic Doctor considers the eternal fate that awaits those called to eternal life, as well as those condemned to everlasting punishment.

THE ETERNAL LIFE OF THE BLESSED

The old Baltimore Catechism posed the question, "*why did God make me?*" The answer is, "*God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him in the next.*" We say that our love for others unites us with them, so we should not be surprised that the chief happiness we look forward after death is union with God, the union we seek throughout our lives.

UNION AND VISION OF GOD

Our union with God is characterized by perfect vision of God, perfect knowledge of Him, and perfect praise of Him. In this life love for God urges us to study the truths of our religion so we can learn more about Him. This study reveals new reasons to love God, so we are invited to spend our lives in a continual process of learning in order to discover more about the Divine Person we love. After our death we encounter none of the obstacles and barriers to human knowledge, so we will be able to see and know God perfectly.

PRAISE ARISES FROM KNOWLEDGE

One thing we will discover is how much greater God is than we can imagine. Only God can fulfill our hope and all our desires, so our knowledge of God will surpass anything we could ever hope to know. St. Augustine teaches us that this knowledge will be a gift too great to keep to ourselves, so it will overflow into praise of the God whom we love.

PERFECT FULFILLMENT

We need not be very old, or have much experience of the world, before we realize that even the most exalted events leave us wanting more. Eventually we surrender to the reality that we cannot make ourselves completely happy, nor can any created thing, no matter how good, completely satisfy us. St. Augustine expressed this in magnificent, poetic terms, "*Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.*"

PLEASURE AND HONOR

Eternal life with God will yield perfect pleasure, for God stands behind any pleasure we can seek or hope for. These days political honor or clerical distinction may have fallen into disrepute, but the Book of Revelation reminds us that Christ's death has made us "*a kingdom and priests*" for God, so everlasting life confers on us the highest civil and religious honors we might hope for.

Moreover, Christ's death makes us His sisters and brothers, which means that all who are baptized are

God's children. We commonly think of children as youngsters, but the Scripture wants us to realize that if we are God's children, we are also God's heirs.

KNOWLEDGE AND SECURITY

Human science has frustrating limitations. No matter how intelligent we may be, our knowledge can never penetrate fully the mysteries of our physical or spiritual lives. In the everlasting life of God's kingdom, however, we shall comprehend all truth and understand whatever we wish to know.

The blessed enjoy what St. Thomas Aquinas calls the happiness of contemplation, the reward for embracing God's will, and ordering our lives on earth to reflect the peace of God's kingdom of heaven. Among the joys of heaven is the knowledge that this life is everlasting, and that no one can take away this gift. A Jesuit theologian, who lived some time after St. Thomas, observed, "*when nothing more is to be wished for, everything is to be feared... for where desire ends, apprehension begins.*" In heaven the blessed need fear no loss, for God's power to give and protect is stronger than any power to threaten or steal.

COMPANIONSHIP OF THE BLESSED

St. Thomas tells us that peace is a state of tranquility between persons or within oneself. Its basis is the virtue of charity, in which all desire is united in a desire for God. The personal peace we seek on earth has a social dimension because God commands us to love one another as we love ourselves. This means fulfilling, to some extent, the will of our neighbor as if it were our own. In heaven the blessed will encounter no obstacle to love, so we may look forward not only to savoring perfectly satisfying relations with others, but to enjoying the happiness of others as if it were our own.

THE ETERNAL DEATH OF THE WICKED

If the rewards of heaven are pleasant to consider, we need only imagine an existence altogether without them to realize some of the horrors the damned will encounter in hell.

SEPARATION FROM GOD

St. John calls Jesus the Light of the World. We need not be physicists to understand that light makes the world warm, bright – and safe. When we sin, we turn away from Christ's light and cultivate spiritual darkness. Those condemned to everlasting punishment will not only be forced to suffer that personal, internal darkness, but a corresponding external darkness as well, in a realm completely devoid of comfort, rest, or hope.

REMORSE

While we live, we may turn away from evil – either because we recognize it for what it is, or because we fear what will befall us if we do not seek what is good. In hell, this choice no longer exists; the damned soul must live forever conscious of its choice of evil, and forever aware that anguish (from which the soul turned away in life) is no longer of any use.

THE PAIN OF SENSE

The approach of physical death may threaten the body with various pains, but the soul is immune to physical pain, and death ultimately brings an end to physical suffering. The punishment of hell is called "everlasting death" because both soul and body will suffer as if dying, but without enjoying any of the respite from pain that comes with death.

DESPAIR

The virtue of hope encourages and enables us to believe that God's love will triumph over any physical adversity we may be forced to face. In hell the damned soul exists without hope, and the realization that the pains it faces will never be alleviated aggravates the soul's punishment.

AN EVERYDAY MORAL

St. Thomas Aquinas preached his homilies on the Creed during Lent. These days call us to reflect on the everlasting life won for us by Our Savior, so Lent is an opportune time to consider our sinfulness and the powerful remedy for sin won by Christ's cross and offered us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, we should not reserve our reflection on the joy or pain that will reward our lives solely to the days of Lent.

The Creed ends with an expression of our belief in everlasting life. Meditating on the reality that underlies these words is a powerful inducement to do good, and an equally powerful warning of what will befall those who choose to do evil. This is a profitable meditation at any time, so our worship appropriately invites us to pray the words of the Creed often. ■

JUBILEE YEAR *(Continued from page 1)*

St. Bernadette wrote

O desolate Jesus, refuge for afflicted souls, your love teaches me that it is from your afflictions that I must draw the strength in which I stand in need to bear my own. I know that the most terrible sufferings I could experience would be to have no share in yours, but you ensured by your agony that the Heavenly Father will not forsake me and that He in His mercy is never so near to me as when I am united to you, O Jesus, by my desolation.

We achieve the perfection of charity when we love God's creation as God loves it. God created our bodies so we are obliged to care for them in spite of their manifold weaknesses. We should bring these weaknesses to God with hope, but the example of St. Bernadette and the Virgin Mary remind us that we must also approach God with trust. "*I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say.*"

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