

My Father's House

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Are You Going to Heaven?

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Are You Going to Heaven? That is, are you going to spend your eternity with God? This is perhaps the most serious question that anyone has to deal with or answer. One time, one of the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, are they few in number who are to be saved?" Now that is a very interesting question. In short, Lord when all is said is done, will most people go to heaven or hell?

Listen to the answer that Jesus gives. I guarantee you, it may shake you up a bit. He meant it to shake us up. Or, even better, He meant it to shake us down, that is to shake all sin out of us. Listen very carefully to His answer. He replied, "Try to come in through the narrow door. Many, I tell you, will try to enter and be unable. When once the master of the house has risen to lock the door, and you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Sir, open the door for us,' he will say in reply, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then, you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your company, you taught in our streets.' But he will answer, 'I do not know where you come from. Away from me you evildoers,'" (Lk 13:22-27). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gave the same teaching, but He put it a little differently. "Enter through the narrow gate, the gate that leads to damnation is wide, the road is clear, and many choose to travel it. But how narrow is the gate that leads to life, how rough the road, and how few there are who find it!" (Mt 7:13-14).

The words of Jesus could scarcely be clearer. The road to salvation is narrow, not wide. And few, not many, find it. How it must have cost Jesus to answer that question so clearly. After all He said and did, Jesus full well realized that most people would reject him and His cross and prefer to live in mortal sin and thus lose their souls. In a sense, the teaching of Jesus was not new. The prophets of the Old Testament consistently warned the Israelites that only a remnant would in fact respond to God in such a measure as to share in His salvation. Isaiah foretold, "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God. For though your people O Israel, were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return; their destruction is decreed as overwhelming justice demands," (Is 10:21-22. Cf also Jeremiah 23:3ff, Micah 2:12; and Zachariah 8:12).

Are You One of the Few

We have paraphrased our question in a slightly different way. No longer are we asking, "Are you going to heaven?", but rather, "are you one of the few who is going to heaven?" In order to answer the question, we have to find out from Jesus what are His demands for entrance into heaven.

The first thing that Jesus asks us to do in order to be saved is to *believe the good news and be baptized*. He said to us in Mark 16, "Go into the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." *The first condition for salvation, therefore, is faith. And the second condition is baptism.*

FAITH

In Ephesians 2:8, Paul teaches us the necessity of faith when he says, "For it is by grace you have been saved by faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast." Therefore, salvation is a free gift offered by grace that comes to us by God's initiative. We do not deserve it. We cannot earn such a gift; but we must respond to it. There is absolutely nothing that mankind has done to earn us redemption and salvation through the life, death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We must accept this gift, first of all and primarily, by believing that Jesus Christ suffered and died that we might be saved. And then we must be baptized into the Church which is the mystical body of Christ.

BAPTISM

Jesus teaches us that we are saved by the water of baptism and by the Holy Spirit (cf John 3). It is at our baptism into the Church that we receive the Holy Spirit, which enables us to have the very life of God, that is the very spirit of God within us. It is only by the Spirit that we can think and love and act like Jesus. Although we do not earn such a salvation, or merit such a Savior, we must fulfill the demands of the Gospel. First to have faith and second to be baptized. St. Peter, as well as St. Paul, clearly teaches. St. Peter says, "This water (Red Sea) symbolized baptism that saves you also" (1 Pet. 2:31). St. Paul further explains, "Do you not realize that all of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were, therefore, buried in Him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, may live a new life" (Rom 6:4).

HOPE

Not only do we need faith in baptism, but we need to trust in the Lord. It is only by relying on Christ and the power of His Spirit that we can sustain our life in Christ. The psalmist tells us to trust in the Lord so that He will bring us into the promised land. In addition to faith, hope or trust is essential to salvation and holiness. It is the second of what we call the Theological Virtues. Our prayer should be, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, for my trust is not in myself but in the Lord."

LOVE

Paul clearly teaches us that if we have faith to move mountains but do not have love, we are no more than a phony gong and a clanging symbol. The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love one another with the love of Jesus. This very special love of Jesus called agape love is the first and the greatest proof of the Holy Spirit. This love has a height in that it comes from Christ, a depth in that it loves the unforgivable and reaches the unreachable, a breadth in that it loves everyone without exception, and a length in that it keeps on loving. This love is the all inclusive virtue. It includes fidelity, purity, humility, steadfastness, perseverance, gentleness, kindness, and forgiveness. In short, it is a faithful, pure, humble, steadfast, persevering, gentle and kind love. It embraces all, it endures all. It covers a multitude of sin. Without this love in our hearts, no one can please God and go to heaven. It is this love that makes us most like God for God is love.

Good Works

Although we did not receive so great a salvation or savior because of our works, nevertheless through faith and baptism we become God's workmanship in order to do good works. Jesus clearly teaches this when He says, "It is not those who say Lord, Lord, but those who do the will of my Father who shall be saved." St. Paul reiterates this when he teaches, "for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for us in advance to do," (Eph 2:10). And St. James reinforces this by saying, "You see that a person is saved by what he does and not by faith alone," (James 2:24).

In His Last Supper discourse, Jesus separates the saved from the unsaved on the basis of doing good works. Those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, and help the sick shall be saved. Those who do not shall hear the words, "Depart from me ye cursed" (cf Mt 25:31-42).

Reconciliation

We need never hear these words, for although all of us have neglected to love others and all of us have sinned, we need but to go to confession and humbly and completely confess our sins to the priest who has been given the authority from Christ to forgive our sins through His shed blood. On Easter Sunday evening, after his horrendous death on Good Friday and glorious resurrection on Eastern Sunday morning, Jesus appeared to his first priests, his apostles, and said to them, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven." Every time we go to confession, three miracles take place. First, Christ cleanses us completely of all sin and guilt. Second, He enables us to totally forgive all those who have hurt us. And third, He empowers us to completely forgive ourselves.

Once reconciled to God and to our neighbor, we are free to receive Him in the Eucharist. Unreconciled, we must leave our gift at the altar and go first and be reconciled. St. Paul clearly teaches us in 1 Corinthians 11 that we must be cleansed of sin before we receive the precious body and blood of Jesus, when he says, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A person ought to go through an examination of conscience before he eats the bread or drinks the cup. For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body and blood of the Lord, eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick" (1 Cor 11:27-30).

The Eucharist

Jesus also teaches that unless we feed upon His flesh and drink His blood in the Eucharist, we shall not have His life within us. Christ uses these sacramental symbols to show us the reality of this new life. His exact words are, "With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this, unless you feed on the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life within you. The person who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (Jn 6:53-56).

Total Obedience

Once the spirit of God has been received in baptism and nurtured through the frequent reception of the sacraments, especially those of reconciliation and the Eucharist, Christ asks of His followers unending and total obedience. He teaches us, "If you love me, you will keep my commands. If you obey my commands, you will stay in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and stayed in his love" (Jn 15:10).

Total Purification

Since heaven is a perfect place and only those who are perfected and purified can get into heaven, God in his love and mercy has a final purification for all of His children who are still imperfect in their obedience and love. The author of Revelation clearly teaches us that no unclean thing can enter into heaven. And St. Peter clearly teaches us "to seek that perfection without which no one can see God." And St. Paul teaches us to try to build upon the one foundation of our faith which is Christ, using gold, silver and precious stones – symbols for very holy activities. And not with wood, stubble or straw – symbols of imperfect or omitted acts for these later will be burnt up in the fire. The person who has committed such imperfect acts will be saved, but only by going through the fire (of purgatory). Heaven would not be heaven if there were sin in heaven. So, obviously, no sinner can get into heaven, only perfect people can. So we thank God for His final mercy in allowing us to be totally purified through the fires of Purgatory.

Heaven

The result of all this is that you and I will be totally perfect and purified for ever and ever with God in heaven. We shall be absolutely perfect, fully loving, totally obedient and completely pure of heart. Jesus teaches us that only the pure of heart can see God. But we shall be totally pure of heart and capable of seeing Jesus and the Father as they are. St. John teaches us that we are God's children now. What we shall be later has not yet come to light. But this much we know, that when it comes to light, we shall see

Him as He is. St. Peter teaches us that we are participators in the divine nature (1 Peter 2:4). In heaven, we shall be totally absorbed into the Godhead, fully participating in the life of the Trinity and thus we shall be filled with perfect joy, lasting peace and real love for ever and ever.

Praise God

"Praise be God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Christ Jesus, in accordance with His pleasure and will -- to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the richness of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph 1:3-8).

Summary

Jesus Christ has been sent by the Father to give us a new life so that by His spirit we can think and love and act like Him and thus, perfected, enter heaven. This love and mercy of the Father revealed in Christ death and resurrection is a free and gratuitous gift. It is grace and mercy all the way. Nothing we have done has earned or merited the coming of Christ's spirit. Nevertheless, in order to be saved we must accept that gift through faith, hope, love, baptism, reconciliation, the Eucharist, and works of love and mercy.

Daily

We receive this love and mercy by daily prayer and meditation and, if possible, daily attendance at Mass and reception of the Eucharist. And by living lives of love and holiness throughout the day. We must obey the Ten Commandments and the clear teachings of Scripture and the Catholic Church, which is the *pillar and standard of truth* (1 Tim 3:15). This includes respect for and obedience to the teachings of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II and the Magisterium of the Church. This also includes fasting and works of penance and the fulfilling of the duties of our state in life, as well as giving honor and devotion to Mary, our mother, and the saints. It also includes contributing our time and talent and treasure to God and to His people.

Act of Consecration

Dear Lord Jesus. I need you. I cannot live the Christian life by myself. When I try to do that, my struggle ends in failure and defeat. I need you to take over my life and live your life through me. I am deeply and heartily sorry for all of my sins of thought, word, action or omission. I do now receive your forgiveness. I forgive all those who have hurt me or harmed me in any way. Take all that I am and all that I have -- my time, talent and treasure; my past, my present, my future, my family, my friends, my foes; my doubts, my insecurities, my fears. I place them all in your loving heart. Now fill me with Your Spirit. Fill my mind with Your wisdom; fill my heart with Your love; fill my life with Your power. AMEN.

Postscript

I've written about this life in the Spirit, this life of holiness, in many other and diverse ways. Please also consult my books on *A Personal Relationship With Jesus*, *Listening to God*, and *Twelve Keys to the Anointing*. Jesus said, "Be holy as I am holy." Since without this holiness, we cannot see God nor enter His presence. Let us use all the means available to become holy now.