



I believe...in the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, life everlasting.

Apostles Creed

Opening Question:

Why do people face the future with dread?

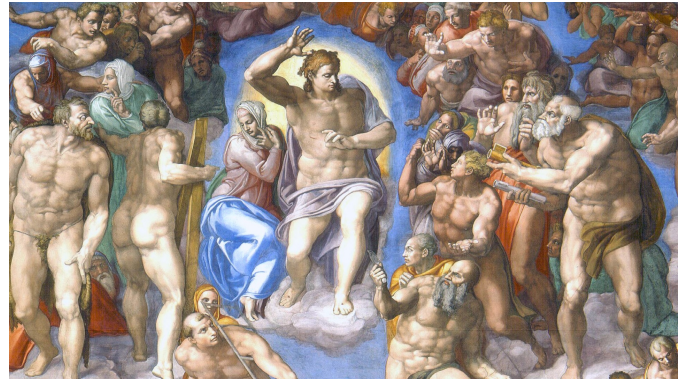
Have you ever looked up to the night sky or at the sunset in awe? Have you ever wondered what lies beyond stars or the sun dipping below the horizon? Or, have you reflected on your own mortality and thought “isn’t there something more to life?” Philosophers and religious people throughout history have clung to the belief that humans do indeed have an afterlife. But we Christians assert humans have a greater promise than merely surviving bodily death. We hold that we can be at peace with our maker through reconciliation, that we have a real bond with those who have died, and we will be made whole by God in the future then live with him forever in bliss.

Forgiveness of Sins

Let’s begin with a question: What does life with God look like? It contains a deep inner peace with one’s self and one’s maker. Such contentment is based upon divine reconciliation. It is the realization that we sinners are not only forgiven by God but have a special place before him. This all began with Jesus on the cross. As the letter to the Ephesians stated:

God was pleased to live fully in his Son so he could reconcile all things. God made peace with all on earth and in heaven through the blood Jesus shed on the cross.

Ephesians 1:19-20



The Risen Christ gave his Church the ministry of reconciliation in its preaching and its worship. We can realize the forgiveness of sins in the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation.

Communion of Saints

Let’s break down the ministry of reconciliation into two parts: those reconciled and those in the process of reconciliation. In the light of the afterlife, the reconciled are those who enjoy the presence of God in heaven. Those in the process are we, the living on earth, who answer the lifelong call of God’s invitation to come closer. But, there is another group, the dying who love God but who also need to set aside the attachments of life. They need to be purged of those things and relationships they still cling to so they can focus on the Lord. These three groups, the blessed in heaven, the faithful on earth, and the purged share in God’s gift of reconciliation. Together they are the Communion of Saints.

We all share in our faith, our worship of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and a concern for each other. Because we all partake in God’s ongoing call to reconciliation, we can pray for each other. We ask the saints in heaven to pray for us. And we can pray for those who have left this world for the next. Because we together form the family of God.

We should note some people don't want to be reconciled to God. They choose to stand outside the Communion of Saints. Some choose to wallow in the seven deadly sins: pride, greed, anger, envy, lust, gluttony or spiritual indifference. Their indulgence can become an addiction. Others choose the illusion of total self-sufficiency and total power. And some just don't care. These people cannot know or enjoy the presence of God because they can't see beyond their own egos. Their focus is completely on themselves. These are some of the reasons for hell.

The Resurrection of the Body

Alright, we Christians are reconciled and have an afterlife with God. But is that all? No. The Good News proclaims personal wholeness and this even reaches beyond death. It asserts we will be reunited with our physical bodies. Just as Jesus rose from the dead so will we at the end of time. Christian faith is built around this belief. Indeed, our tradition, our creed, even our worship all focus on the resurrection of the body. Consider what St. Paul said about baptism.

Don't you already know that, when we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death? If we are united to Christ in a death like his, we will rise to a new life like his.

Romans 6:3, 5

Consider what Jesus said about the Eucharist.

The person who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:54

Faith in the resurrection of the body does not negate the reality of death. It is the natural end of life. But death is also the result of sin. Humanity rebelled against God but Jesus underwent death and rose to new life as a model for our future. So, Christ turned death from a curse into a blessing. We can have hope in the face of death that, as we are now reconciled to God, we will be in his loving hands both after death and at the end of time.

Life Everlasting:

The Particular Judgment

The Church teaches there are two aspects to the afterlife: a spiritual one immediately after death and a physical one at the end of time. The spiritual afterlife takes us out of the physical world and the constraints of time. At this point, we will be stripped of ego and will see ourselves for better or ill just as God sees us. And we will know the answer to two questions: Did we love God above all else? Did we love others as much as we loved ourselves? This experience will determine our state in the afterlife. Will we enjoy bliss with God in heaven, have the need to purge out earthly attachments in Purgatory, or reject God outright in hell? It is called the particular judgment.

Life Everlasting: The Final Judgment

At the end of time, all the promises of faith will be realized. We will all rise from the dead and be made whole body and soul. Then we will stand before the Son of Man in the final judgment.

When the Son of Man comes in power, he will sit on his royal throne. Then everyone who ever lived will gather before him. Just like a shepherd who separates sheep from goats, he will divide everyone into two groups. He will call some people to his right, like the sheep. But, he will put the others on his left, like the goats.

Then, he will say to those on his right, "My Father has blessed you. Come and receive the Kingdom God planned when he created everything. I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you made me feel at home. I had few clothes and you gave me more. I was sick and you visited me. I was under arrest and you came to see me."

Then, the good people who stand at the Son's right will say, "Lord, when did we do all this for you?"

"Listen!" the Son answered. "Whenever you served the least important person, you served me."

Matthew 25:31-37a, 40

Closing Question:

How does your faith give you hope for the future?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 946-962, 976-1060.

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