

Today the Church celebrates an important truth of her faith: that, after rising from the dead and appearing to his disciples for a period of forty days, the Lord ascended in his glorified body to heaven, “to the right hand of the Father,” beyond the reaches of this fallen world. The ascension is the declaration that humanity’s true homeland is in heaven with God.

Heaven is the place where God and his creatures dwell in perfect communion. We speak of it as a “place” though it is more than a place—it is the permanent condition of being perfectly united to God in the spiritual bonds of love.

The Catechism defines heaven as “communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed.” (CCC 1024) To live in heaven is “to be with Christ.”

Humanity was created to share in the life of heaven by living in harmony with God. Adam and Eve were created in a state of blessedness, their hearts turned naturally and spontaneously to their Creator in effortless love. Had they not sinned, they would have passed painlessly from this world to heaven when it pleased God to call them to himself.

Sadly, hearkening to the lies of the ancient Serpent, the devil, and disbelieving God, they withdrew from the blessed life. As a consequence, their minds were darkened and their wills became helpless slaves to pride.

This sad state of affairs they passed on to their descendants and, with it, the penalty of death. In Adam and Eve, we became a fallen race.

But thanks be to God, our merciful Father, who determined to restore the human race through the Incarnation of his Son! Christ became the New Adam, fulfilling the human vocation to love God and neighbor and overthrowing the tyranny of pride by the meekness of his Person.

By suffering for us, even to the point laying down his life for us on the Cross, Christ reopened the way to heaven. He made it possible for all who are born again in him through faith and baptism to walk with him along the way of the Cross within this life so as to attain to the Resurrection of the dead and ascent into the glory of heaven.

If heaven is not so much a “place” but the permanent condition of being perfectly united to God in the bonds of life, the life of heaven begins in the soul at the moment of baptism when we receive from Christ, the New Adam, our eternal inheritance—the gift of the Holy Spirit, God’s own eternal life and love, who comes to dwell in our hearts.

Through this gift, Christ lives in us, and we in him. We are no longer compelled to be the slaves of ignorance and pride as children of the first Adam and Eve. We are freed to become children of the New Adam, Christ, and the New Eve, the Blessed Virgin, our minds enlightened by the light of Christ and our wills humbled by his suffering.

In walking with Jesus along the Way of the Cross as Christians, the life of heaven grows stronger in us. We advance in holiness of life as we are conformed to the image of our crucified and risen Savior, in the sure and certain hope that, having followed this Way even to the point of laying down our lives with Christ for the sake of others, we shall triumph over sin and death; so that rising on the Last Day in the Resurrection of the just, we shall also ascend to the permanency of heavenly Kingdom, where the old order has passed away and God will be all in all.

Yours in Christ,

Father Walter