

**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of OT: Yr. B – 2021**  
[Ez 17:22-24; 2 Cor 5:6-10; Mk 4:26-34]

St. Paul said something curious in our second reading: *“While we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. [...] We would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.”* In other words, this life cannot be all that there is. We were created for the infinite, this is why we always want more. For example, our eyes are bigger than our stomachs when we go to a buffet; too much food causes pain. Yet our soul knows no limits. Can we ever experience too much beauty, love, or truth? If this life were all there is we would be cheated. We each have a soul with a beginning, but no end. Our choices will determine where our soul resides next. So here’s a road map of what happens after death:

Bl. John Duns Scotus, the famous philosopher and Franciscan priest, is laid to rest in Cologne with a rather intriguing inscription on his tomb: *“A double death preceded his burial.”* In other words, he died to himself spiritually before dying physically. The reason we fear death is that we are not prepared for it. Ven. Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, *“Most of us die only once when we should have died a thousand times,”* that is died to ourself.

At death we must stand before Jesus in Judgment and find out who we truly are. In each of us exists multiple self’s: the person we think we are; the person others think we are; and who we truly are. Admittedly, it is easy to believe our own press. This is why we need an unbiased judgement. Standing before Jesus’ throne yields a two-fold recognition. First, we will see who we truly are and know without argument whether we are prepared for Heaven or not. Second, Jesus needs to be able to recognize himself in us; hence we are called to imitate Christ. Then we are assigned one of three paths: Hell, Purgatory or Heaven. Fulton Sheen said, *“Hell is pain without love; Purgatory is pain with love; and Heaven is love without pain.”*

Hell was best described by the Italian author, Dante, in his book, *The Divine Comedy*. Though a work of fiction, the theology was spot on. Dante described Hell as an upside-down cone; the further you enter into it, the more closed in you are. This fits with St. Augustine describing sin as being caved in on oneself through self-preoccupation. Then Dante depicted Satan as a sad and pathetic figure locked in ice up to his waist. Satan has large wings that flap, but he never moves. Again, sin immobilizes us and locks us in the tiny universe of our ego. The spirit is meant to be free and fly, this is why we depict angels with wings. Satan is trapped and weighed down by sin. All he can do is disguise his misery in every temptation that he sends. For the saying goes, *“Misery loves company.”*

Purgatory is a state or process that purifies our souls. At judgment when we recognize that we failed to properly get ready for the wedding banquet of Heaven, this is a second chance. To enter Heaven, whatever is not godly must be purged, either in this lifetime or the next. This can happen through persecution, suffering, or penance; if done after death, we call it Purgatory. Pope Benedict said, *“Purgatory basically means that God can put the pieces back together again.”* Purgatory is a gradual adjustment to God’s radiance. It is like emerging from a cave after a month of darkness into the noonday sun, there must be a gradual adjustment.

Heaven, said Pope Benedict, is a person that we call Jesus Christ. Remember, to be human we must have a body and soul. When our soul is separated from our body at death, our soul enters the Body of Christ to make us complete again. At the end of time, we get our Resurrected body back and then we inherit a new Garden of Eden that St. John referred to as the New Heavens and New Earth. This is a place of perfect communion with all the angels, saints, and the Blessed Trinity. We describe this communion as a wedding, a great feast, and a city of right worship. It is illuminated not by the sun, but the radiance of Jesus the Lamb of God.

If we desire to live with God, make a renewed commitment to those words: *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;”* and choose your path carefully, knowing the desired destination. For Jesus told St. Gertrude in prayer, *“My heaven would not be complete without you.”*