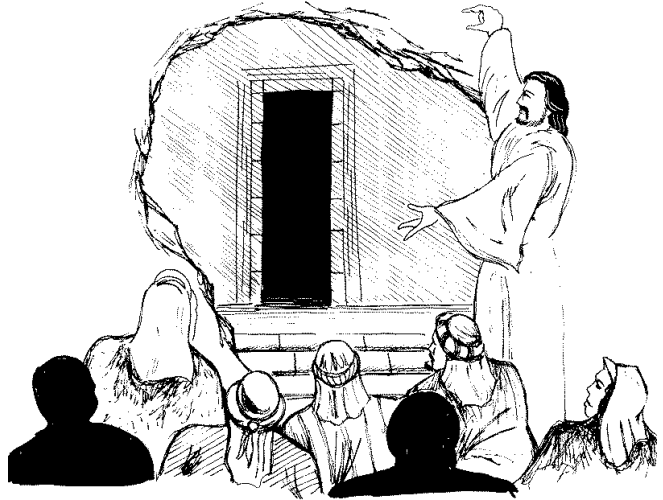


Catholic Teaching on Death & Eternity

The Apostle's Creed, an ancient statement of Christian faith, ends with the following lines:
(I believe in...) the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen

This resurrection is not just a return to the old life of sickness and pain (as was the case when Jairus' daughter and Lazarus were raised to life) but a beginning of an entirely new life where sickness and death have no sway. **This life is a share of Christ's Resurrection.** This belief has implications.



- The human, in body and soul, is the work of God. Our bodies are not to be discarded at death like cast-offs.
 - Redemption ('buying back') must be complete; we must be redeemed **body and soul.**

- Members of the Church *already* begin to share Christ's resurrected life through Baptism, the beginning of **life in Christ**, onwards. Receiving the Eucharist, Christ's risen body, is the physical reality of this shared life. *'Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day.'* John 6:54
- It is no accident that the statement from the Creed comes at the end. *(I believe in...) the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.* It expresses the goal and purpose of God's plan.

Consider John's account of the disbelief of Thomas.

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed but Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.' John 20:24-9

- Thomas was in the same position we find ourselves today - having heard about the Resurrection but not having seeing the Risen Christ.
- His *choice* is to demand evidence. He could choose to believe without 'proof'.
- All four Gospels point to the change in Jesus after his Resurrection. He is able mysteriously to enter their company. Distances and barriers don't constrain his glorified body as he had allowed them to do before.

- *'Peace be with you'* is the greeting of the Risen Lord (recorded twice in John's Gospel and once in Luke's). His presence is not that of a ghost - a cause of fear. Peace, real peace, is a sign of the Kingdom of God.
- Nevertheless, the marks of the Crucifixion are still on his glorified body - showing that his body is that which it was before, but glorified. So it is with those who are raised to new life in the resurrection of the body.
- *'Doubt no longer but believe.'* The problem with 'proof' is that what satisfies one may not satisfy another. Thomas must still believe, although his faith is given support.
- *'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'* When Jesus spoke of happiness it was not to mean temporary enjoyment or pleasure. Happiness refers to the happiness of those who dwell in eternity with God. *'How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.'* Matthew 5:3.
- Therefore a share in the Resurrection is offered to those with faith in the Resurrection.

Heaven, Purgatory, Hell

- The New Testament clearly teaches that all will rise again, both good and bad. (See the Last Judgement, Matthew 25:31-46.) Not all will share in the happiness of eternal life with God.
 - Some, having rejected God completely by their thoughts words and deeds, will have cut themselves off from His presence. This will be an eternal punishment for them - the extreme horror of having lost forever the sight of God. This is **hell**, the punishment of the damned.
 - **Heaven**, by complete contrast, is the happiness of being with God forever, and is the reward of the just and faithful.
 - Those destined for heaven and yet lacking the fullness of faith and hope and love, are purified after death in **purgatory**.
 - The distinction between heaven and purgatory is brought out on All Saints' Day, when we honour the Saints and ask for the prayers (they do not need our prayers for them), and on All Souls' Day, when we pray for those still being purified in purgatory to speed them to their destiny (though we may also ask for their prayers).
 - According to Catholic Theology, only those in purgatory may benefit from our prayers for their salvation, though assured, is not complete; the damned *cannot* be saved and the saints *are already* saved.

Life after death: continuity and radical break

- Life after death has **continuity** with this life in that: *there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.* (1 Corinthians 13:13).
 - **In essence, we will be judged on our love.** How we are and what we do in this life has eternal consequences.
- In another way, there is a **radical break** between this life and the life to come in that:
 - Seeing God face to face is the **fullness** of His revelation.
 - All that now helps our salvation is fulfilled or unnecessary when our salvation is complete.