

RCIA CLASS 10
THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND LIFE EVERLASTING

I. Christianity teaches that, as Jesus was raised from the dead, so we will be raised again, with glorified bodies.

A. Jesus rose with a risen body that was, at the same time, glorified and different from His mortal body, but also recognizable.

1. Thus, when people first saw the risen Christ, they sometimes did not recognize Him. But then they would realize who He is when He spoke to them, reminding them of His guidance and appealing to their faith. See, e.g., Luke 24:1-35; John 20:11-18, 21:1-14.

2. Jesus was able to go from place to place at will, pass through barriers, and appear and disappear at will. See, e.g., Mark 16:14; Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26. However, He was also tangible and ate with the disciples as He had done before His death. See, e.g., Luke 24:41-43, John 20:17, 27. His risen body was and is more substantial than it had been before, and so

B. Likewise, the early Christians declared that, as Christ rose from the dead, we also will rise again from the dead, in imitation of Him.

1. The Old Testament had already spoken of the Resurrection in a few passages, and hinted at it in others. See, e.g., Dan. 12:2-4; Is. 66:14-24; Ps. 49:13-15, 73:24; 2 Macc. 7:11, 14; Wis. 3:1-9.

2. Jesus then more plainly spoke of the resurrection of the dead, clearly affirming that there would be such a resurrection. At the time there was a dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees on this point; and Jesus spoke in favor of the former. See Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40; John 5:25-29, 6:41, 52, 58 (especially associating the resurrection with the Eucharist.)

3. The early Christians, and especially St. Paul, emphasized the resurrection of the dead as central in the Christian faith, in opposition to many who believed either in no resurrection, or in only the soul being immortal. See, e.g., Acts 13:30-32, 23:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:12-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:13.

C. The fact that our bodies will be raised again has important implications for how we live now.

1. We should treat the human body, neither as the final end, nor as irrelevant, but rather as a means given to us now of glorifying God. As St. Paul says, "Glorify God in your body." 1 Cor. 6:20; cf. Rom. 12:1.

2. Thus, rightful joys of this life can be accepted, as Jesus accepted them, but must not become the final ends. Rather, they should be seen as gifts from God and first promises of the greater joy of heaven. When our happiness depends upon certain pleasures being available, they those pleasures have become our masters. See 1 Cor. 6:12.

3. Good health is a great gift, so that we may glorify God better, but illness can also be seen as a way of joining with Jesus through suffering and detachment

from earthly desires. All suffering, in fact, can be joined to Jesus. See Col. 1:24-25. Thus, our love of God can be shown forth, as the love of husband and wife “in good times and bad, in sickness and health” in all situations on earth until death, but forever in heaven. It is a point that St. Pope John Paul II made in his series of talks now entitled The Theology of the Body.

4. We show forth our loyalty by what we do in the body. For example, a married couple shows forth love for each other in the rightful use of sexuality, and in the caring for children. In providing for the needs of others, and in all other ways, acting with charity, courage, sympathy and the like, we live out our faith in practice. Faith is not merely abstract, but is lived through the body. See James 1:27.

5. Likewise, when we worship God and when we live out our faith in the world, we employ physical means, such as singing, the spoken word, standing, kneeling, processions, symbols, etc. These visible things will come to an end, as the earthly body does. But they are visible signs on earth of a greater glory beyond death.

- The sacramental system works through the senses (e.g., the words of each sacrament, such signs as water, oil, and the taste of bread and wine) to bring grace from heaven to earth, and our minds to heaven.

- Liturgy uses motions, gestures, words, images, even the scent of incense, to bring out a sense of the holy.

- Christian art, architecture, music, literature, etc. uses the senses to glorify God and give a sense of greater things. See, e.g., Catechism 2500-2503; Vatican II Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963) 122-27.

6. Likewise, physical things of nature or even the good things we make glorify God and ennoble ourselves if we are willing to see them in their rightful context, not as final goods, but rather as reflections of the goodness of God. See, e.g., Ps. 19:1, 29; Dan. 3:59-90; St. John Paul II, On the Dignity of Human Labor 9 (1981); Vatican II Council, Gaudium et Spes 34, 38 (1965).

D. The rightful attitude towards the human body can be expressed with a number of symbols.

1. St. Paul compares the human body to a tent that we dwell in now during our journey, which will one day become a glorious temple showing forth the splendor of God. 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 5:1-4. The analogy can work in another direction, comparing this life to the Chosen People’s journey in tents through the desert to the Promised Land.

2. Jesus and St. Paul also use the image of this body as like a seed that will one day die, but then, if planted rightly flourish into a tree, bearing fruit forever. See John 12:24; 1 Cor. 15:37, 42-44

3. St. Gregory the Great and St. Francis of Assisi both compared the body to a donkey on which we travel now, which is stubborn, but necessary, and which

teaches us humility and how to ride. The body will one day die, but then become a glorious horse that will bring us to everlasting life. See St. Gregory the Great, The Rule of Pastoral Care, part III, chapter 12. As Peter Kreeft points out, C.S. Lewis in his book Miracles drew a similar analogy, saying also that no one with any common sense either worships or hates a donkey. See Miracles (1947) ch. 16.

4. St. Gregory the Great and St. John Chrysostom also called the body the harp of the soul, which is meant to become a harp of the Holy Spirit. See St. Gregory the Great, *Epistle to Leander*; St John Chrysostom, Holy Week Homily on Psalm 145 (3). We now have a very limited instrument, upon which we learn to play music to God. One day it will become glorious, and enable us to express our love to God in fullness.

II. After this life is over, there will be a judgment of our lives, and at the end of all things on earth, a final judgment of all of human history.

A. “Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ. The New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in His second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith.” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1021.

B. At death, there is an immediate result, or judgment, which is in the same direction as the final judgment will be, for or against God. Especially toward the end of His public ministry, Jesus continually spoke of this time of final decision. See, e.g., Matt. 24:45-51, 25:14-30; Luke 14:15-23, 19:11-27; see also Rev. 20:15, 21:8. And therefore, this life, in which we make the choice between an eternity with or against God, is the ultimate adventure.

1. Getting to heaven and thereby glorifying God is the final goal of human life, toward which all else should be subjected. All prices are worth paying for this glory and joy. Jesus spoke of this choice in such parables as the pearl of great price and the treasure in a field. See, e.g., Matt. 14:44-46.

2. One must make that final choice for or against receiving the grace of God.

- “Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they see Him as He is, face to face. . . . The elect live in Christ, but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name. . . . In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God’s will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with Him they shall reign for ever and ever.” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1023, 1025, 1029.

- “We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love Him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against Him, against our neighbor, or against ourselves: He who does not love remains in death. . . . To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from Him forever by our own free choice.

This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called hell.” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1033; see also Catechism 1034-1037

3. God is willing to forgive sins, but He gives us the choice about whether to accept that forgiveness or not. If one is not willing to live in the love of God, if one does not accept the light, God gives that choice its terrible effect and allows one to live in the prison and darkness of evil forever.

- Jesus did emphasize the Father’s willingness to forgive, see, e.g., Luke 15, but also emphasized that that offer must be accepted in time, or the decision against Him will be final. See, e.g., Matt. 24:45-25:46..

4. Because nothing impure can be in heaven, see, e.g., Rev. 21:27, Ps. 15, 24:3-6, nor would anyone in heaven want to be impure, those who die in a state of grace, i.e., friendship with God, but who are still attached to sin or not fully in love with God must be purified.

- Jesus said that anyone who would be His disciple must pick up his cross and follow Him, see Matt. 10:38, 16:24; Mark 10:34; purgatory allows those who were with God, but weakly, now to suffer with Christ, to carry the cross with Him. St. Paul speaks of those who are saved, but only as through fire. See 1 Cor. 3:15; see also 2 Macc. 12:46.

- “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. . . . The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect. . . . From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1030-1032.

C. There will be a final judgment in which all nations, and all of human history is summarized. See Matt. 25:31-46. All things will be revealed, and the meaning of every event and every person’s life will at last be known. See Matt. 10:26; Rev. 20:11-21:8.

D. We do not know what heaven is like, for “eye has not seen and ear has not heard, nor has it entered the human heart what God has prepared for those who love Him.” 1 Cor. 2:9. However, some images help us to sense a desire for heaven. Heaven is our final homeland, and yet a place we have never seen. And so, like St. Thomas, we may ask how we are to get to heaven if we have never seen it. Jesus responds, “I am the way, and the truth, and the light.” John 14:16. That is, He accompanies along a journey to a place that we have never seen, but in our final native land.

1. Heaven can be compared to a kingdom, in which the saints are rulers, given even cities to govern. See, e.g., Matt. 5:3, 10; Luke 19:11-27; Wis. 3:8.

2. Heaven is like a colossal, indeed infinite city of gold, jewels, and light towards which the best of every nation comes and brings its greatest treasures. See Rev. 21:9-27; Ps. 87.

3. Heaven is like glorious fields, in which nature now is purified as a new creation, with all her beauty, but no longer suffering under corruption, conflict or pain. See Rev. 22:1-5; Is. 65:17-25; Amos 9:13-15; Ps. 23:1-3.
4. Heaven is like the celebration of a wedding feast, but a feast that never ends. See Matt. 22:1; Luke 14:15-24; Ps. 23:5.
5. Heaven is a society of people who are now at their best, having been transformed by Christ into glory. See 1 John 3:3.
6. Heaven is place in which all good actions of this earth are glorified, sanctified and celebrated forever. See Vatican II Council, Gaudium et Spes 39.
7. The letters to seven churches at the beginning of the Book of Revelation give some images of the reward: a restored garden of Eden, now beyond the possibility of evil; conquest over death and decay; receiving one's real identity and calling; joining with God in the rule of nations; being purified and glorified by Jesus before the angels; being forever in the glorious temple and city of the heavenly Jerusalem; and being forever in the company of Jesus in the wondrous people of His kingdom. See Rev. 2:1-3:22.