

The happiness of heaven exceeds our ability to imagine and articulate. For St. Paul says: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Co 2, 9). But just as we can come to some understanding of God indirectly, that is, by considering what He is not (apophatic), so too can we come to a very real understanding of the happiness of heaven by a similar negative method, that is, by coming to understand what happiness is and what the happiness of heaven is not. Allow me to begin with a few points on human happiness.

A person is an individual substance of a rational nature (Boethius). A man is a person. He has the capacity to know and to love. As we said in the previous chapter, knowledge and love are two ways that the human person expands or becomes larger, and happiness has everything to do with personal expansion or enlargement.

To know something outside of you, such as the oak tree in your front yard, is to be united to it in a certain way. Knowledge is in you, and so the thing you know (oak tree) is in you, but not in the same way it exists outside of you—i.e., the oak tree does not exist in you physically, but mentally (as a concept). The tree, or whatever it is we are knowing, exists in the mind immaterially, which is why Aristotle said that the mind becomes in a way all things.

In other words, in knowledge, you and I become something other than ourselves without ceasing to be ourselves. And so knowledge is both a union and a kind of expansion or enlargement of the self. And as Aristotle says in his first line of his *Metaphysics*, "All men by nature desire to know". In other words, all men by nature desire to become more than they are.

The difference between knowing and eating is that eating results in the destruction of its object, while knowledge does not. Moreover, eating results in the physical enlargement of the self, while knowledge brings about a spiritual or mental expansion.

The reason all men by nature desire to know is that "good" is a property of being. Just as rationality is a property of man, and growth is a property of living things, so too is "good" a property of being, so that whatever exists is good, in so far as it exists. The good is an object of desire, and all things desire, at a basic level, to be most fully, which is why plants strive to keep themselves alive via nutrition and why animals hunt for food and run from danger, etc. And that is why man desires to know, because knowledge is a way to exist more fully, that is, to be more than what one currently is, without ceasing to be what one is. It is a way to be more perfectly.

It follows from the above that man naturally loves himself; for to love another is to will the good of another. We naturally will the best for ourselves, that is, we naturally will our own perfection. Now, we know ourselves as persons with the capacity for knowing, and so we know ourselves as incomplete and thus open to expansion. We also know others as beings of the same nature as ourselves, that is, as human persons. But we don't necessarily love them as we love ourselves. To love them as another self is to will the best for them as we will the best for ourselves. And just as we will the best for ourselves for our own sake, to love another as another self is to will his good for his sake, not for the sake of what that might do for me. But to love the other as another self is something that one can only decide to do or not to do; it is not something that occurs necessarily, but by choice.

To decide to love the other as another self, however, is to become that person without ceasing to be myself. In knowledge, the other exists in me as known, but in love, I exist outside myself as him. His good (his well-being) has become my good, and so if I love him, I will his well-being and rejoice in it.

This too, as was said previously, is a kind of self-expansion, an enlargement of the self. If I refuse to love the other for his sake, but choose, rather, to love myself for my sake and the other only for what he or she does for me, then I do not love the other as another self, but as an instrument to be used. And so I have not become the other; I have not expanded. My love for the other is much like my love for food, which I love for my sake, not for the good of the food; for we do not destroy what we love, but we destroy food in the process of eating it. The love we have for food and drink is nothing more than self-love.

And so true disinterested love is the love of the other for his sake, not for my sake, and it is this love that achieves a real enlargement of the self. Now to exist is good, but to exist more fully is better. And so a rational kind of existence is better than a non-rational kind of existence; it is better to be a person than to be a plant. And since happiness is another word for "well-being", happiness has to do with being most fully. To be happy is to exist well.

Now, to know is good, but to know and love is even better. It follows that the greater our knowledge and love, the larger we are, and thus the happier we are.

There is something more noble about love of another than knowledge considered by itself. As was said above, when something is known, it exists in me in a new way; but when I love another person as another self, I exist outside myself as him, without ceasing to be myself, and so love involves a kind of ecstasy. The very word ecstasy comes from the Greek, *ekstasis*, which means "to be outside oneself". In order to love someone as another self, I have to first know him as someone like myself, and so the self-expansion involved in the love of another can only occur in addition to the self-expansion involved in knowing. Hence, love achieves a greater self-expansion than does knowledge alone—that is why we all agree that a knowledgeable person is not necessarily a good or noble person.

Hence, the more we love others for their sake (disinterestedly), the larger we become and thus the better we become, and the happier we become. The more we "exit" ourselves in a genuinely disinterested love of the other, the more ecstatic life becomes.

Notice how this rings true to our own experience. If I truly love another, such as my daughter, as another me, then her happiness becomes my own, and so I genuinely delight in her well-being. When she is happy, I am happy. Consider someone you truly love and recall how happy you are to discover that this person has become truly happy. The more people we love with this kind of selfless love, it only follows that the happier we will become, for our happiness will be doubled, and tripled, and quadrupled, etc.

There are a variety of ways to become more than what one currently is. This is another way of saying that there are certain intrinsic goods that perfect us as human persons. One's own physical life can become better, or healthier. The possession of truth, as we said above, involves an expansion of the self, whether that turns out to be scientific, historical, philosophical, or theological truth, etc. One is raised up or taken outside of oneself (*ekstasis*) through the contemplation of the beautiful, as we might find in beautiful music, poetry, scenery, photography, or paintings, etc. The production of works and the development of our natural talents for certain activities (mechanical, musical, athletic, etc.) perfects us as human persons.

Of course, we become more than what we are considered individually through relationships grounded in love, such as friendships, acquaintances, and in our relationship to our parents and particularly to the civil community as a whole. In fact, an element of our own happiness is the feeling of having a debt that cannot be paid. Without that feeling, one lacks gratitude, and without gratitude, our relationship to our parents and to the civil community as a whole is not what is can and ought to be.

In marriage, two become one flesh, one body, something much more than an individual considered in himself. Moral integrity, which is the harmony that exists between reason and one's choices, is a higher good than any of the previously mentioned, and it is fundamentally related to the highest intrinsic human good, which is the virtue of religion, which is the virtue by which one renders due worship and reverence to God, the source of all that is good and who is Goodness Itself.

Those who choose to love the good itself, not merely their “delectable” good, will be moved to seek the giver behind the gifts that enrich their lives and of which they know they are not the cause. Thus, on a natural level they seek the face of God: “Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? The man with clean hands and pure heart, who desires not worthless things, who has not sworn so as to deceive his neighbor. He shall receive blessings from the Lord and reward from the God who saves him. Such are the men who seek him, seek the face of the God of Jacob” (Ps 24, 3-6).¹

To seek to know God, to seek His approval (favor), is to seek His face. But we cannot find it directly on our own. Nevertheless, something of His face is discerned in his effects, just as we form an image of a person's face, whom we've never met, in the reading of his correspondence, or in his works: “For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” (Rm 1, 19-20). Moreover, as St. Bernard writes: “Reason and natural justice alike move me to give up myself wholly to loving Him to whom I owe all that I have and am. But faith shows me that I should love Him far more than I love myself, as I come to realize that He hath given me not my own life only, but even Himself. Yet, before the time of full revelation had come, before the Word was made flesh, died on the Cross, came forth from the grave, and returned to His Father; before God had shown us how much He loved us by all this plenitude of grace, the commandment had been uttered, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might' (Deut. 6:5), that is, with all thy being, all thy knowledge, all thy powers. And it was not unjust for God to claim this from His own work and gifts. Why should not the creature love his Creator, who gave him the power to love? Why should he not love Him with all his being, since it is by His gift alone that he can do anything that is good?”²

Forever Satiated and Forever Thirsty

Although we might seek the face of God as the cause of all the goods of the physical universe, knowing God intuitively or directly, as He is in Himself, exceeds the capacity of human nature. This means that we depend on God to freely and gratuitously grant us a sharing in His divine nature (grace), which is supernatural. But this dependency on the gratuity of another—in this case God's gratuitous self-giving—is something that we already know through our natural friendships, as well as

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas points out that every human being has a natural knowledge of God, albeit confused and general. For it is not possible to desire what one does not know, and all human persons desire happiness, one that is final, complete, sufficient unto itself, and enduring. But only God answers to these properties, for He alone is final, complete, sufficient unto Himself, and eternal. He writes: “To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for many there are who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.” *S. T.*, I, q. 2, 1, ad 1.

² St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, ch. 5.

through our parents and the social whole. Our natural happiness, which is an imperfect happiness, is dependent upon the gratuitous self-giving of others, for we cannot force anyone to receive our love, that is, to be our friends; love isn't love unless it is freely given. And we know the feeling of having a debt that cannot be paid in full, both with respect to our parents as well as to the civil community as a whole, in particular with regard to the sacrifices of countless others (i.e., soldiers) who have gone before us, etc., and that feeling, which when welcomed translates into gratitude, is also an element of our happiness.

How much more is this gratuitous element and the feeling of having a debt that cannot be fully repaid an essential part of the supernatural happiness that comes from knowing and loving God directly in the Beatific Vision? One's complete and utter fulfillment consists in the possession of God through direct knowledge and love, and this depends upon the divine initiative to lift him beyond the powers of his limited nature through divine grace and reveal Himself to him in the Beatific Vision. St. Alphonsus Liguori writes: "The glory of heaven consists in seeing and loving God face to face.... The reward which God promises to us, does not consist altogether in the beauty, the harmony, and other advantages of the city of Paradise. God himself, whom the saints are allowed to behold, is, according to the promise made to Abraham, the principal reward of the just in heaven."³

God is the source of all that is good, and since the effect cannot exceed the cause, He contains within Himself all the perfections of the created order; these perfections exist in God *as* God. For example, beauty exists in God not as a property, but as God—He is subsistent Beauty. And since God is without limits, God is Beauty without limit. It follows that there is no beauty that can exist which exceeds the beauty of God.

So too is God Goodness Itself, as well as Truth Itself. To know Truth Itself and to possess Goodness Itself and to contemplate Beauty Itself is to achieve a perfect and unimaginable happiness. It is simply not possible to desire other finite goods *for our own fulfillment*, goods that are not God, when we possess the Supreme, Perfect, and Unlimited Good; for all things are possessed in the Beatific Vision of the divine nature.⁴ The goods we sacrifice here, in this life, for the sake of

³ *Sermons of St. Alphonsus Liguori*, Serm. 16, 4. Second Sunday of Lent. Illinois, Tan Books, 1982.

⁴ Joseph Owens writes: "...for Aquinas, a thing can have three ways of existing. Its first and most fundamental way of existence is in the divine intellect. There it is the same in reality as the divine essence, differing only in concept. The second way is by existing in itself, or in an angelic mind. Both these types of existence depend immediately upon the first type. The third way of existing is in the human intellect, and is based immediately upon the existence of the things in themselves. The existence of things in the divine intellect is accordingly for Aquinas a much stronger and more perfect existence than their existence in themselves. It is prior to the real existence in the created world, and not dependent on it. It is an existence that lasts forever, because it is really identical with the creative essence. This eternal existence of things may be found instinctively surmised at times. On the death of a family pet dog known from their earliest conscious years, children will react with the spontaneous conviction that some day they will be with Heidi again. Browning was able to write in his poem "Abt Vogler": "There never shall be one lost good; what was, shall be as before." Both the instinctive reaction and the poetic inspiration seem well grounded in reality when they are assessed from the viewpoints of Aquinas' metaphysics. In its highest point of elevation the existence of every creature is eternal. ...all things whatsoever have eternal existence in the divine creative intellect, and that this is the highest type of existence they can have.

All things, it will mean, are possessed in the beatific vision of the divine creative essence. They are possessed cognitively in it in their highest kind of existence. Anything missed or sacrificed for the sake of the right or the holy is accordingly never lost. Rather, eternal possession of it is assured. "Possession," in fact, may be a weak word here. The "possession" consists in being those things cognitively, and not in the comparatively weak way of a cognition that follows upon and is dependent upon the things in their sensible existence. Rather, it is like the angelic cognition in having them as objects in their highest way of being. In the graduated orders of existence listed by Aquinas the existence of things in the divine intellect is prior to their existence in themselves, while their existence in themselves is prior to their existence in present human cognition. It is not hard to see in this perspective the definitive answer to the objection

eternal life will be possessed by the blessed in eternal life, but these goods will possess an inconceivably richer mode of existence, for we will possess them in God, who is Goodness Itself, because He is Being Itself. For example, the religious who vows chastity and poverty will possess all the goods he or she sacrifices in a much higher way in God. The good of sexual union, which is a marital act, is an echo of a much higher good; for there is much more to sexual union than the temporary pleasure of orgasm; it is a union of persons, and it achieves a profound and exclusive intimacy; in short, it is a kind of knowledge—we speak of carnal knowledge. Sexual union in marital intimacy is a kind of connatural knowledge (an interior knowledge of the other that is always more than what can be articulated in words). The point, however, is that all that the marital act imparts to married couples—an intimate and blessed knowledge of the other as well as the joy of being intimately known, a knowledge that is too deep for words—is possessed in heaven in a superabundance that exceeds the capacity of the sexual act to impart. Similarly, poverty for the sake of the kingdom of God is rewarded exceedingly, because to possess God in eternity is to possess everything.

It is possible for us to get a tiny glimpse of this through prayer—at least a certain level and intensity of prayer.⁵ Sometimes a person becomes so entranced by the beauty of the divine mercy in prayer, a beauty that he or she has come to apprehend through a life of faith and the light that belongs to faith, that he or she desires nothing else but to rest in God for as long as possible. At such times, one does not wish to engage in any kind of activity except that of prayer, which at this level is a resting in and adoration of God. It is at such times that one begins to understand that the happiness of heaven is a perfect resting in God (Cf. Heb 3, 11).

But this rest does not imply a cessation of desire. Rather, it involves a cessation of *a certain kind of desire*, that is, desire that is part and parcel of the state of imperfection, that is, the state of being on the way to God. In heaven, one does not desire the perfect good as if one does not possess it, but one desires God in a way that is consistent with the possession of God. St. Alphonsus Liguori writes:

But the joys of Paradise constantly satiate and content the heart. “I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear” (Ps 16, 15). And though they satiate, they always appear to be as new as the first time they were experienced: they are always enjoyed and always desired, always desired and always possessed. “Satiety”, says St. Gregory, “accompanies desire” (Mor., bk 18, ch. 18). Thus, the desires of the saints in Paradise do not beget pain, because they are always satisfied; and satiety does not produce disgust, because it is always accompanied with desire. Hence the soul shall be always satiated and always thirsty: she shall be for ever thirsty and always satiated with delights.⁶

that contemplation is a shadowy and unreal possession of things, like having them in a day dream. On the contrary, just as existence for sensible things in themselves is real in comparison with their cognitional existence in the human mind at present, so their existence in the beatific cognition is of a higher type than their real existence just in themselves. It is in this sense that “every perfection of things good” is attained in the beatific contemplation, when explained in the metaphysical perspective of Aquinas.” *Human Destiny: Some Problems for Catholic Philosophy*. The Catholic University of America Press, 1985. p. 45-46.

⁵ “How great is the sweetness which a soul experiences when, in the time of prayer, God, by a ray of his own light, shows to her his goodness and his mercies towards her, and particularly the love which Jesus Christ has borne to her in his passion! She feels her heart melting and as it were dissolved through love. But in this life we do not see God as he really is: we see him as it were in the dark”. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *op.cit.*, 16, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16, 8. In the same sermon, he writes: “They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house” – Ps., xxxv. 9. In beholding the beauty of God, the soul shall be so inflamed and so inebriated with divine love, that she shall remain happily lost in God; for she shall entirely forget herself, and for all eternity shall think only of loving and praising the immense good which she shall possess for ever, without the fear of having it in her power ever to lose it. 16, 8.

St. Bernard also writes: “Here indeed is appeasement without weariness: here never-quenched thirst for knowledge, without distress; here eternal and infinite desire which knows no want; here, finally, is that sober inebriation which comes not from drinking new wine but from enjoying God”.⁷

But all this does not really capture the happiness of heaven from the inside, so to speak. Yet I believe we can do so, to some extent at least, by analogy, and the best place to begin is by considering the happiness or ecstasy that results from a genuinely disinterested love.

To love another disinterestedly, as we said above, is to will his good, at least as much as I will my own. To will his good is to will that he be most fully (to be fully good, and fully beautiful). This includes the will that the other know his goodness and delight in it, that is, to be happy. To know that the one we love is as happy as he deserves to be makes us happy, if we truly love him.

Now, to praise another is to acknowledge his goodness. Praising another expresses the delight we take in his goodness. If the other does not delight in his own goodness because he is not fully aware of it, we praise him in order to acknowledge what he has yet to acknowledge, because we want him—or her, of course—to delight or rejoice in that goodness. We praise our children because we want them to know their own goodness as we know it and to be as happy as they deserve to be. To praise another genuinely is to share in his happiness, or to help make him as happy as we’d like him to be—as happy as we are, if not more so.

There is a certain oneness in this—one knowledge (he and I both know his goodness), and one joy (he and I both rejoice in his goodness). In other words, I delight in his glory, and if his goodness is recognized by others, I delight in that acknowledgment, that he is being praised by others as he deserves. Moreover, I delight also that his happiness is increasing in this very acknowledgment and praise; for he is happy that he has pleased us, because he loves us too and does not want only to please himself. He is good, and so he wants that goodness to spread out beyond himself to others. He delights that we are delighted, and we are delighted that he is delighted and that his delight has been increased. We also may hope that it continues to increase, and knowing that it will only renders us increasingly happy.

That Our Principal Happiness in Heaven is in the Happiness of God

Charity is disinterested love of God; an intimate love of God under the aspect of personal friendship. Now friendship implies a certain common quality, and thus a certain equality. Divine grace is precisely this common quality that brings about a certain equality of sorts; for divine grace is a sharing in the divine nature. By divine grace we are raised to a supernatural level without ceasing to be human. In other words, grace renders us holy, and God is Holiness Itself.

Charity is the love of God for God’s sake, not for our own. To love with charity is to love God because He is supremely good and deserving of love. Bishop Bossuet wrote: “It is agreed with the majority of the school that charity is a love of God for himself, independently of the beatitude to be found in him.”⁸

⁷ St. Bernard of Clairvaux. *On Loving God*, chapter 11 in *Treatises II: The Steps of Humility and Pride and On Loving God*. Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications, 1980, pp. 121-125.

⁸ Quoted in *On Prayer: Spiritual Instructions on the Various States of Prayer According to the Doctrine of Bossuet Bishop of Meaux 1931*. London: Burns and Oates & Washbourne, 1931. p. 90. He also writes: “It is said that Christians have become accustomed to seek God only for their interest and beatitude: but who has accustomed them? Not the Bishop of Meaux, who set himself to show from the Scriptures, from the holy doctors and most of all from S. Augustine, that the love which we bear to God as a beatifying object (that is, as the source of our happiness), necessarily presupposes the love we have for him because of his perfections and his infinite lovableness, without which charity itself would no longer exist, bereft of its principal object, which is the excellence of the divine nature.” *Ibid.*, p. 90-91.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of the four degrees of love, beginning with the love of self, moving on to the love of God for the sake of myself, to the love of God because God is good in Himself, and finally to the love of self in God. He writes: The third degree of love... is to love God on His own account, solely because He is God.”⁹ He continues: “The fourth degree of love is attained for ever when we love God only and supremely, when we do not even love ourselves except for God's sake; so that He Himself is the reward of them that love Him, the everlasting reward of an everlasting love.”¹⁰

If we love God for His sake, we have “become Him” without ceasing to be ourselves; for all disinterested love is a “becoming the beloved” and thus a self-expansion. This “exit of self” towards “becoming Him” is only possible through His grace, for it is only through Him that we can “go out to meet Him” to love Him as another “self”.¹¹ God loves Himself in us. We do not will that He become most fully the Person He is meant to be, because He is that eternally, but we will His Supreme Goodness, we know It, affirm It, praise It, and delight in It, which He is perfectly and eternally. He is eternally and perfectly happy, and so we are happy that He is perfectly and eternally happy as He deserves and as no other creature deserves to be.

Hence, we share in His infinite happiness; that happiness is our greatest happiness.¹² That He is joyful, that He is Joy Itself, renders us full of joy. The blessed see his glory, and they are happy that He is glorified in heaven and that all praise Him for His supreme goodness, for His mercy, His justice, His Love, His wisdom, His generosity, etc. That He is praised by so many only increases our joy.

And God is pleased by our praise, which adds nothing to His greatness, but He is pleased nonetheless, because He loves us, and our praise is good for us, although we praise Him not for our sake, but on account of Him. That He is pleased with us serves to increase our delight, because we love Him and want Him to be pleased, as a child is pleased that his father is pleased with him; for he loves his father and wants to please him. Hence, we are of one love, of one happiness, of one joy. This one joy is God’s happiness, and it is God, since whatever is in God is identical to His act of existing. In short, His happiness is the cause of our joy; it is the principle of our happiness. That is why he says: “...Come, enter into your master's joy’ (Mt 25, 21).” We do not enter into our own joy, but a joy that is larger than ourselves, for God cannot be contained.

Now, not even the entire host of heaven can praise God as much as God deserves to be praised and loved, and that could become a source of sadness for us; our joy would be imperfect if this state of affairs went unrectified. But it is the Son who offers Him perfect praise that measures up to what He is deserving of. And so we delight in the Son’s love of the Father. Our happiness is complete in the knowledge of the Son’s perfect love of the Father, His perfect praise of Him. But such worship of the Son is also deserving of immeasurable praise and glory in return, and so we delight in the

⁹ *On Loving God*, chapter 9.

¹⁰ St. Bernard also writes: “How blessed is he who reaches the fourth degree of love, wherein one loves himself only in God! ...In Him should all our affections center, so that in all things we should seek only to do His will, not to please ourselves. And real happiness will come, not in gratifying our desires or in gaining transient pleasures, but in accomplishing God's will for us.... To reach this state is to become godlike. As a drop of water poured into wine loses itself, and takes the color and savor of wine; or as a bar of iron, heated red-hot, becomes like fire itself, forgetting its own nature; or as the air, radiant with sun-beams, seems not so much to be illuminated as to be light itself; so in the saints all human affections melt away by some unspeakable transmutation into the will of God. For how could God be all in all, if anything merely human remained in man? The substance will endure, but in another beauty, a higher power, a greater glory.” *Ibid.*, chapter 10.

¹¹ The distance between the creature and God is an infinite distance, and so nothing but the Divine Nature Itself, which is infinite, can bridge that infinite distance.

¹² St. Francis de Sales writes: “the height of love’s ecstasy is to have our will not in its own contentment but in God’s”. *Treatise on the Love of God*. Translated by Rev. Henry Benedict Mackey, O.S.B. Illinois: Tan Books, 1997. Bk 6, 2.

knowledge of the Father's love of the Son. It is a perfect love, a love and praise equal to what He deserves.

That praise of the Son has planted Itself on earthly soil (Calvary), and so now the earth offers the Father, in the Son, fitting and perfect praise. Creation may now achieve perfection in him who praises the Father perfectly and loves all things on account of Him, and for Him, that He may be perfectly loved and praised. And the Father loves all things on account of the Son, Jesus Christ, and for him, that he may be loved, praised, and glorified. And so all things were created through him and for him: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1, 15-16).

The angels worship Him, and one angel's worship of Him is beautiful, but it does not do Him perfect justice, although He delights in it: "Lord, extolled in the heights by angelic powers, you are also praised by all earth's creatures, each in its own way. With all the splendor of heavenly worship, you still delight in such tokens of love as earth can offer. May heaven and earth together acclaim you as King. May the praise that is sung in heaven resound in the heart of every creature on earth" (from *Liturgy of the Hours*, Morning Prayer, Sunday, Week III).

The entire hierarchy of angels offers Him fitting praise because it is total, and that worship increases our joy, because our joy is in His happiness. But that praise and worship does not measure up to what He fully deserves; for He is deserving of infinite and omnipotent praise, the praise that only He, the Lord, can give. God the Son praises the Father, loves the Father, adores the Father, offers Himself to Him, and the Father loves the Son and glorifies Him as He deserves. This mutual love of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, is our life in heaven. It is All for everyone and everyone's All (1 Co 15, 28).¹³

¹³ The Son's life is orientated entirely, completely, undividedly to the glory of the Father. Moreover, "the glory of God is man fully alive", as St. Irenaeus points out. God is a consuming fire (a symbol of the divine love), and that fire consumes all that can be consumed, all that is inconsistent with the purity of the divine love (1 Cor 3, 10-15). The happiness of heaven is precisely in that love, the love of God, the delight in the happiness of God, and in the love of neighbor, the delight in the happiness of that neighbor, our brother and sister. Just one soul in the misery of hell, not fully alive but spiritually dead, implies that God's glory can be increased accordingly, and the happiness of heaven as well can be increased to some degree. Christ spoke of the joy among the angels that results from the repentance of just one soul (Lk 15, 10), and so anything less than the Father's complete and perfect glory is intolerable for the eternal Son. He wills our greatest joy, and we too, with him, will the greatest joy among the communion of saints and the greatest glory of the Father. The Church prays for the salvation of all, of everyone. Heaven will not rest until complete victory over death, over every dead soul, is achieved, so that God may be *all in all* (1 Cor 15, 28). I believe it is in that spirit that George MacDonald writes: "When once to a man the human face is the human face divine, and the hand of his neighbour is the hand of a brother, then will he understand what St. Paul meant when he said, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren." But he will no longer understand those who, so far from feeling the love of their neighbour an essential of their being, expect to be set free from its law in the world to come. There, at least, for the glory of God, they may limit its expansive tendencies to the narrow circle of their heaven. On its battlements of safety, they will regard hell from afar, and say to each other, "Hark! Listen to their moans. But do not weep, for they are our neighbours no more." St. Paul would be wretched before the throne of God, if he thought there was one man beyond the pale of his mercy, and that as much for God's glory as for the man's sake. And what shall we say of the man Christ Jesus? Who, that loves his brother, would not, upheld by the love of Christ, and with a dim hope that in the far-off time there might be some help for him, arise from the company of the blessed, and walk down into the dismal regions of despair, to sit with the last, the only unredeemed, the Judas of his race, and be himself more blessed in the pains of hell, than in the glories of heaven? Who, in the midst of the golden harps and the white wings, knowing that one of his kind, one miserable brother in the old-world-time when men were taught to love their neighbour as themselves, was howling unheeded far below in the vaults of the creation, who, I say, would not feel that he must arise, that he had no choice, that, awful as it was, he must gird his loins, and go down into the smoke and the darkness and the fire, travelling the weary and fearful road into the far country to find his brother? –who, I mean, that has the mind of Christ, that had the love of the Father?" *Unspoken Sermons*, "Love Thy Neighbour".

On the Joy of Being Known

Aristotle understood that man's greatest happiness consists in the contemplation of the highest things. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes: "For while the whole life of the gods is blessed, and that of men too in so far as some likeness of such activity belongs to them, none of the other animals is happy, since they in no way share in contemplation. Happiness extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not as a mere concomitant but in virtue of the contemplation; for this is in itself precious. Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation."¹⁴

We believe this, of course, but we would take this further and say that man's perfect happiness consists in the contemplation of the highest being, who is Truth Itself, Goodness Itself, and Beauty Itself, that is, God Himself.

But this tells only half the story. The Jewish understanding of "knowledge" is very different than what we find in the world of the Greek thinkers, and when we consider it in light of the happiness of heaven, I believe we come to a more complete picture of what the joy of heaven might involve.

For the Jews, to know is to experience, to taste, to enter into a kind of union that is best likened to the relationship between a bride and her groom. At the Annunciation, when the angel revealed to Mary that she will conceive and give birth to a son, she replied: "How can this be since I do not know man" (Lk 1, 34). In other words, Mary had not experienced sexual union with a man, for she was a virgin.

Moreover, to know another is to "convert", that is, to turn to him, to face him, that is, to see him. One turns towards what one loves. Sexual union involves the lover and beloved mutually facing one another. To love the poor, such as the widow and the orphan, is to "see" them, that is, to visit (*visitare, visere*) them.

Jesus pointed out that at the end of time, he will respond to certain others who will claim to have prophesied, exorcised demons, and worked miracles in his name: "I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evildoers!" (Mt 7, 23). In other words, these people did not allow Christ to enter into them, to know them, to visit them, that is, to live in them. "Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him" (Jn 14, 23). In the book of Revelation, we read: "Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears me calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with me" (Rv 3, 20).

To possess truth, that is, to know, is to possess a person, and a bride possesses her husband by receiving him into herself, and he by entering into her. To know is to have entered into a relationship of love. That is why the sexual imagery of the *Song of Songs* is a fitting vehicle to describe more perfectly the relationship between God and Israel: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Sg 1, 2).

And so, it is true to say that the joy of heaven, because it consists in the possession of God, the possession of the Supreme Good and the Supremely Beautiful, consists at the same time in God, the Supremely Beautiful, turning towards the blessed individually, knowing that person, and delighting in that knowledge: "You ravish my heart, my sister, my promised bride, you ravish my heart with a single one of your glances, with one single pearl of your necklace" (Sg 4, 1-15; Cf. Sg 2, 13-14).

¹⁴ Bk 10, 8: "...the activity of our intelligence constitutes the complete happiness of man, ... So if it is true that intelligence is divine in comparison with man, then a life guided by intelligence is divine in comparison with human life. We must not follow those who advise us to have human thoughts, since we are only men, and mortal thoughts, as mortals should; on the contrary, we should try to become immortal as far as that is possible and do our utmost to live in accordance with what is highest in us." *EN*, 10, 7

Of course, it is true that God has always known us, for His knowledge is the cause of whatever is. But in heaven we will know that we are known. As St. Paul says: "Then I shall know even as I have been known" (1 Cor 13, 12). Consider the reaction of the young teenager who has just learned that a certain girl has taken a keen interest in him, that she "likes him". He is overjoyed; he is radiant inside; he is given a new lease on life. And when he enters into a relationship with her, he begins to see himself from her point of view.

Similarly, when we "know even as we have been known", we see ourselves in God. In the book of Revelation, we read: "To those who prove victorious I will give the hidden manna and a white stone—a stone with a new name written on it, known only to the man who receives it" (Rev 2, 17). A name is one's identity, and a name given by God, known only to the man who receives it, is indicative of one's profoundest identity. In other words, God will reveal us to ourselves individually, and we will know ourselves in Him, as He knows us, and we will love ourselves perfectly, without any disorder or egoism, and between us will be a knowledge and intimacy, that is, an intimate space in which no one else may enter. Catholic poet Paul Claudel writes:

Then I shall know even as I have been known," says the Apostle. [1 Cor. 13:12] Then shall we see, as unity is seen in variety, the essential rhythm of that movement which is my soul, that measure which is my self. We will not only see it, we will be it, we will present ourselves in the fullness of freedom and knowledge and in the purity of a perfect love. From the bosom of the Lamb we will borrow our individuality, in order to have something to give to Him. In this bitter mortal existence the most poignant joys revealed to our nature are those which attend the creation of a soul by joining of two bodies. Alas, they are but the lowly image of that substantial embrace when the soul, having learned its name and purpose, will surrender itself with a word, will inhale and exhale itself in succession. O continuation of our heart, unutterable word! O dance divine!

All carnal possession is of limited span and duration; what are its transports compared to this royal wedding? "You have made your people feel hardships; you have given us stupefying wine." [Psalm 59:5] What is the seizing of an empire or of a woman's body in a ruthless embrace in comparison with this divine ravishment, like lime seizing sand, and what death (death, our very precious inheritance) grants us in the end so perfect a sacrifice, so generous a restoration, so fatherly and so loving a gift? Such is the reward promised to all the righteous, and this unprecedented wage which amazes the workers of the parable.

But in reality the dowry of each soul will differ from the next, like the will of which it is the embodiment, the purpose that gave it birth, and the one that gave it glory.¹⁵

And so it is true to say that the joy of being in love (*eros*) and having someone in love with you is a distant and faint echo of the intimacy between God and the blessed in heaven.

What would it be like to be completely forgotten, so that no one knows you or your name anymore? Could one conceive of a greater suffering? There is a basic human goodness, an incalculable value that belongs to each person created in the image and likeness of God that demands to be acknowledged, precisely because it is unique, true, good, and beautiful. Joy does not

¹⁵ *I Believe in God: A Meditation on the Apostle's Creed*. ed. Agnes Du Sarment. Trans. Helen Weaver. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963. p 298-299. Claudel writes: "Such is this new name mentioned in the Bible, this proper name by which we have been called unto eternal life, this unutterable name which always remains a secret between the Creator and us, and which is imparted to no other. To learn this name is to understand our own nature, to be sustained by our own *raison d'être*. Like a word made up of vowels and consonants, our soul draws from God with each breath the fullness of its resonance. Thus, for the soul, birth will be identical with understanding, with a fully illuminated awareness". *Ibid.*, p. 309.

consist only in knowing something other than oneself, but also in being known and loved. In heaven, we will know that we are known, that is, beheld by One to whom no one else can be compared in beauty and goodness, and He will delight in each person's uniqueness, of which He is the cause. And so the joy will be incomparably greater than any kind of experience of being in love with some marvellously beautiful human being.

And so just as the Father loves the Son, and the Son in turn loves the Father, we too will be taken up into an eternal movement of love in which we delight in His happiness and in the perfect praise He receives from the Son, and in which we are delighted and touched that He has turned to us, taken a keen interest in us, and delights in us individually as if we are the only person that exists, and we love Him in return, forever desiring that others know that love.

Some of the greatest wounds that reside deep within a person almost always have to do with broken relationships and unresolved issues with his or her own father, or mother, family or spouse. But the most significant human relationships in our lives, the relationships we have with our father, mother, family, or spouse, and which are all meant to be a prelude to a perfect father's love, a perfect mother's love, the love of a perfect family, and the love of a perfect spouse, will be fully achieved in our union with the one Triune God. In heaven, when we are completely and directly brought into the inner life of the Trinity, we will know the joy of being loved by one who is more perfectly our Father than our own biological father. At the same time, we will know the joy of a perfect Mother's love: the Holy Spirit, the Uncreated Immaculate Conception, who delights eternally in the love between the Father and the Son. That mother's love will know us and take hold of us. At the same time, the joy that we long for of being known, loved, accepted, and embraced by a family, will be perfectly achieved within the inner life of the Trinity, the eternal and perfect family.

Rejoicing in the Happiness of the Blessed

In heaven we delight in the happiness of others, because we love them. We acknowledge their good and delight in it, that is, in their glory and happiness, because their happiness is one with God's; for there is only one happiness in heaven: "...that they may be one as we are one, Father" (Jn 17, 11). We delight in their glory because they glorify God, and we love them in God; for their glory is a proclamation of His glory, and although they add nothing to His greatness, they glorify Him and so they delight us. What they have become tells of God in some way we do not, and this is what we love. They will proclaim something that I do not, and I will delight in what they say, that they say it, that it belongs to them to say it, and that they are happy to say it. My praise of them, my reverence for them, will be a continuation of my praise and reverence of God. I will totally delight in their happiness, and I will rest in the knowledge that they are at rest, and of course their rest is God's rest in which they share. In heaven, it all begins and ends in God, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Rev 1, 8). And so our happiness for them is really a function of our happiness for God. He is pleased with them, and so we are pleased with them. That He is pleased with them makes them happy, and so that makes us happy as well—since we love them as much as we love ourselves (as another self). St. Anselm writes about this joy:

Now surely, if someone else whom you loved in every respect as you do yourself were also to have such happiness, then your own joy would be doubled; for you would rejoice for him no less than for yourself. And if two or three or many more persons were to have such happiness, you would rejoice for each of them as much as for yourself – assuming that you loved each as you do yourself. Therefore, in the case of that perfect love whereby countless happy angels and men shall each love the other no less than himself, each one shall rejoice for every other as much

as for himself. So, then, if the heart of man shall scarcely be able to contain its own joy over its own so great good, how shall it be able to contain so many other equally immense joys?

Surely, each person rejoices in another's good fortune to the extent that he loves this other. Therefore, in that perfect happiness, just as each person will love God incomparably more than himself and all those who are with himself, so each will rejoice inestimably more over the happiness of God than over either his own happiness or that of all the others who are with himself. But if with all his heart, all his mind, and all his soul each [of the just] shall so love God that his whole heart, whole mind, and whole soul will not exhaust God's worthiness to be loved, surely with all his heart, all his mind, and all his soul each shall so rejoice that his whole heart, whole mind, and whole soul will not be able to contain the fullness of that joy.¹⁶

In heaven, there is a desire for the body, but this desire does not compete with the desire for God. The desire for a body is nothing but a function of one's love for God. St. Bernard explains this:

What of the souls already released from their bodies? We believe that they are overwhelmed in that vast sea of eternal light and of luminous eternity. But no one denies that they still hope and desire to receive their bodies again: whence it is plain that they are not yet wholly transformed, and that something of self remains yet unsundered. Not until death is swallowed up in victory, and perennial light overflows the uttermost bounds of darkness, not until celestial glory clothes our bodies, can our souls be freed entirely from self and give themselves up to God. ...the spirit would not yearn for reunion with the flesh if without the flesh it could be consummated.... The body is a help to the soul that loves God, even when it is ill, even when it is dead, and all the more when it is raised again from the dead: for illness is an aid to penitence; death is the gate of rest; and the resurrection will bring consummation. So, rightly, the soul would not be perfected without the body, since she recognizes that in every condition it has been needful to her good.¹⁷

There is nothing in heaven the desire of which competes with the desire for God. Whatever we love in heaven, we do so only insofar as it has reference to God, that is, in so far as it is a function of our love for God, or better yet, God's love for Himself. Whatever we see with the glorified body is

¹⁶ *Proslogion*, ch. 25. In the same chapter, he writes: "Do you delight in friendship? They shall love God more than themselves and shall love one another as themselves; and God shall love them more than they love themselves. For through Him they shall love Him and themselves and one another; but He loves Himself and them through Himself. Do you want unison? They shall all have one will, because they shall have no will except the will of God. Do you desire power? They shall be all-powerful in will, even as God is all-powerful in will. For as God is able to do through Himself that which He wills, so they shall be able to do through Him that which they shall will. For as they shall will nothing other than He shall will, so He shall will whatever they shall will. And what He shall will must come to pass. Do honor and riches delight you? God shall set His good and faithful servants over many things; indeed, they shall be, as well as be called, sons of God and gods. And where His Son shall be, there they too shall be, for they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Do you want true security? Surely they shall be certain that they shall never in any way lack these many goods – or rather this one Good – even as they shall be certain (1) that they shall not lose it of their own free wills, (2) that God, who loves them, shall not rend it away from them against their wills while they are loving Him, and (3) that nothing more powerful than God shall separate them from God against their wills. But where goodness of such quality and of such enormity is present, how rich and how extensive must be the corresponding joy! O human heart, heart beset with need, heart versed in tribulation – yea, overwhelmed with tribulation – how much you would rejoice were you to abound in all these goods!" *Anselm of Canterbury*, Volume One, edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert W. Richardson. Toronto, Edwin Mellen Press, 1974.

¹⁷ *On Loving God*, chapter 11.

beheld differently because of our union with God; and that is something we already experience here. Without God, creation becomes nauseatingly empty: “Now I see: I recall better what I felt the other day at the seashore when I held the pebble. It was a sort of sweetish sickness. How unpleasant it was! It came from the stone, I’m sure of it, it passed from the stone to my hand. Yes, that’s it, that’s just it—a sort of nausea in the hands”.¹⁸ But the more we are immersed in God, the more beautiful creation becomes for us. Teilhard de Chardin writes:

Rich with the sap of the world, I rise up towards the Spirit whose vesture is the magnificence of the material universe but who smiles at me from far beyond all victories; and, lost in the mystery of the flesh of God, I cannot tell which is the more radiant bliss: to have found the Word and so be able to achieve the mastery of matter, or to have mastered matter and so be able to attain and submit to the light of God.¹⁹

In God we see creation for what it really is. And so just as “the heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims its builder's craft” (Ps 19, 2), so too in heaven, creation continues to proclaim His glory: “Dew and rain, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. Frost and chill, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. Ice and snow, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever... Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever” (Dn 3, 68-70; 76). These will praise and exalt him above all and forever, eternally, and the blessed in heaven will love them for that reason, in Him in other words; for the blessed, more than ever before, see creation for what it really is, namely a liturgy of praise and thanksgiving. Just as a person in love sees the face of his beloved everywhere, so too wherever one looks and whatever one hears or touches, one perceives what he loves principally, which is God.

Concluding Thoughts

If what is said above is true, it follows that the envious, or the proud, those who love ultimately for the sake of themselves despite appearances to the contrary, will not be able to come to a genuine appreciation of the happiness of the blessed, because they don’t know disinterested love at this time, and the happiness of heaven consists in precisely this kind of love. And because it consists in precisely this kind of love, the preparation for heaven is arduous and difficult, because it is ultimately about learning to love, or better yet, learning to lose oneself: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Mt 16, 25)²⁰

¹⁸ J. P. Sartre. *Nausea*, translated by Lloyd Alexander. New York: New Directions, 1964, p. 10-11.

¹⁹ *Hymn of the Universe*. s.v. "The Offering". The Great Library Collection by R.P. Pryne. Toronto: Canada, 2015.

²⁰ “I know your longings and I have heard your frequent sighs. Already you wish to be in the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. Already you desire the delights of the eternal home, the heavenly land that is full of joy. But that hour is not yet come. There remains yet another hour, a time of war, of labor, and of trial. You long to be filled with the highest good, but you cannot attain it now. I am that sovereign Good. Await Me, until the kingdom of God shall come.

You must still be tried on earth, and exercised in many things. Consolation will sometimes be given you, but the complete fullness of it is not granted. Take courage, therefore, and be strong both to do and to suffer what is contrary to nature.

You must put on the new man. You must be changed into another man. You must often do the things you do not wish to do and forego those you do wish. What pleases others will succeed; what pleases you will not. The words of others will be heard; what you say will be accounted as nothing. Others will ask and receive; you will ask and not receive. Others will gain great fame among men; about you nothing will be said. To others the doing of this or that will be entrusted; you will be judged useless. At all this nature will sometimes be sad, and it will be a great thing if you bear this sadness in silence. For in these and many similar ways the faithful servant of the Lord is wont to be tried, to see how far he can deny himself and break himself in all things....

Love is difficult and requires a great deal of time, tribulation, suffering, as well as prayer and reflection on divine providence. William of St. Thierry writes:

For through this picturing of your passion, O Christ, our pondering on the good that you have wrought for us leads us forthwith to love the highest good. That good you make us see in the work of salvation, not by an understanding arising from human effort nor by the eyes of our mind that tremble and shrink from your light, but by the peaceful experience of love, and by the good use of our sight and enjoyment of your sweetness, while your wisdom sweetly orders our affairs. ...In sweet meditation on the wonderful sacrament of your passion she muses on the good that you have wrought on our behalf, the good that is as great as you yourself are great, the good that is yourself. She seems to herself to see you face to face when you thus show her, in the cross and in the work of your salvation, the face of the ultimate Good. The cross itself becomes for her the face of a mind that is well-disposed toward God.²¹

The achievement of love requires tribulation and suffering only because inordinate love of self is almost invisible to the one who has it and is far more difficult to uproot—and requires much more time—than the uprooting of a large oak tree, for example.

But now is the only time to begin doing that difficult work: “Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Co 6, 2). Unless a person strives with the utmost effort to enter through the narrow gate of pure disinterested love of God, a gate so small that only a child may enter, one dies unprepared and ill-disposed to enjoy the company of the saints, who will inevitably appear as a company of strangers.

Bow humbly, therefore, under the will of all, and do not heed who said this or commanded that. But let it be your special care when something is commanded, or even hinted at, whether by a superior or an inferior or an equal, that you take it in good part and try honestly to perform it. Let one person seek one thing and another something else. Let one glory in this, another in that, and both be praised a thousand times over. But as for you, rejoice neither in one or the other, but only in contempt of yourself and in My pleasure and honor. Let this be your wish: That whether in life or in death God may be glorified in you.” Thomas a Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk 3, 49.

²¹ William of St. Thierry, *The Works of William of St. Thierry*, Volume 1: *On Contemplating God, Prayer, Meditations*. Trans. Sister Penelope, CSMV. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1979. Meditation 10:7, p. 153-154.