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CROSS AND CROWN

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Eternal Youth

THE blessed are always thirsting and always filled. Their satiety is ever new, with a newness that does not pass. St. Augustine in Sermon 362, no. 29, deals admirably with this subject in a passage quoted by Bossuet in his fourth Sermon for the feast of All Saints. St. Augustine writes: "Our entire activity will be an *Amen*, an *Alleluia*: in other words, an assent to the truth and the expression of praise in adoration and thanksgiving. Do not grow sad, considering this activity in a completely material manner, and do not say here that if one were to stand, repeating continually *Amen*, *Alleluia*, he would soon be exhausted with boredom and would finally fall asleep repeating these words. This *Amen*, this *Alleluia* will not be expressed by evanescent sounds, but by the sentiments of the soul on fire with love. What does this *Amen* signify? What does this *Alleluia* mean? *Amen*: it is true; *Alleluia*: praise God. God is immutable truth knowing no defect, no progress, no falling off, no increase, nor the slightest inclination to falsity: eternal and stable truth, remaining forever incorruptible.

"Thus we shall indeed say *Amen*, but with an insatiable satiety: with satiety, because we shall possess perfect abundance; but with a satiety that is always insatiable, if we may speak in this fashion, because this good, which is always satisfying, will produce in us an ever new pleasure. In the degree, therefore, in which you will be insatiably sated with the truth, in the same degree you will say by this insatiable truth: *Amen*, it is true. Rest and see; this will be a continual sabbath." It will be an eternal repose in a sovereign action which will not end, and which will in a way be always new; rest in God eternally possessed and loved above all else and more than ourselves. The Greek philosophers disputed whether beatitude is found in pleasure in movement, or in pleasure in repose. Aristotle shows clearly that the highest joy is that which is the complement, the completion of perfect normal activity, which no

longer tends toward its end but possesses it and rests in it.¹ This is realized in an eminent degree in the beatitude of heaven.

The joy found in this beatitude is a continually new satiety, because its newness never ends. The first instant of the beatific vision lasts forever, like an eternal morning, an eternal springtime, an eternal youth. This is explained by consideration of the very beatitude of God. He possesses His life all at once in the single instant of immobile eternity. He cannot grow old; for Him there is no past, no future, but an eternal present which contains eminently all time, as the summit of a pyramid or of a cone contains eminently all the points of the base of this geometric figure, or as the gaze of a man on a mountain embraces the whole valley below. God thus possesses His life all at once, *tota simul*, without beginning or end; this is the definition of eternity.

We can conceive this wealth when we are told that Mozart in composing a melody heard it *all at once* in the musical law which produced it; he heard the end while composing the beginning. Thus great scholars embrace all their knowledge in a single glance.

The beatific vision of the saints is likewise measured by the single instant of immobile eternity. As a result, the immense joy of the moment of their entrance into heaven will not pass; its newness, its freshness will be eternally present. Therefore, in this sense, this vision will always be new and so will the joy which will result from it.

We have a foretaste of the joy of heaven in the very pure joy experienced in tasting the word of God. If we are well disposed, this joy does not pass but rather increases, because we see ever more clearly the value of the divine word. The more we receive it, the more eager we are to do so, whereas the more we possess sensible goods at first keenly desired, the more we see their limitations and the more the joy they give us diminishes.

If a spiritual friendship lasts ten, twenty years, and more and remains always new, we may take it as a sign that this friendship is of divine origin. Likewise the word of God gives a holy joy, which makes

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. X, chaps. 4, 5, 8. "Pleasure is added to the act as its flower is to youth." And the highest joy is that resulting from the loftiest act of the highest faculty, that is to say, from the intellectual knowledge of God, united to love of the Sovereign Good.

a man forget temporarily the difficulties of business, the pressing duties of home, the excessively eager search for vain amusements. It is divine truth and supreme goodness that are glimpsed which nourish the soul. As Bossuet says (*loc. cit.*): "If this divine truth delights us when expressed by evanescent sounds, how greatly will it ravish us when it will speak to us in its own eternally permanent voice! . . . God in heaven does not utter many words; He utters only one, the same for all eternity, His Word, and He has said everything. It is in this Word that we shall see all." "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," says the Psalmist, and you shall have, as it were, the prelude of the joy of heaven. It will be repose in unceasing action, in an immediate vision of God, which will fill the soul with love and with a continually new joy. *Gaudium de veritate et de bonitate divina*.

St. Thomas,² following St. Augustine, says that, whereas man grows weary of sensible goods when he possesses them, the contrary is true of spiritual goods; the more a man possesses spiritual goods, the more he loves them; for they are not consumed, they are not exhausted, and they are of a nature to produce an always new joy in us. This is sometimes experienced in prayer; it is like the realization of the admirable prayer of St. Nicholas of Flue: "My Lord and my God, take from me all that hinders me from going to Thee; give me all that will lead me to Thee. Take me from myself and give me entirely to Thyself in order that I may belong completely to Thee." It is as if God penetrated more and more deeply the depths of our spiritual will, which desires increasingly to be seized and, as it were, wounded by Him, so that He may possess it fully.

This doctrine is admirably expressed by the author of *The Imitation*: "In all things and above all rest in God, O my soul, because He is the eternal repose of the saints. Loving and sweet Jesus, grant that I may rest in Thee more than in all creatures; more than in health, beauty, honors, and glory; more than in every power and dignity; more than in knowledge, riches, and arts; more than in all merit and every desire, more even than in Thy gifts and all the rewards that Thou canst lavish on us; more than in the happiness and the transports that the soul can

² Cf. Ia IIae, q. 2, a. 1, ad 3; IIa IIae, q. 20, a. 4.

receive and feel; more finally than in the Angels and Archangels and all the heavenly host; above all things visible and invisible, more than in all that is not Thee, O my God! For Thou alone art infinitely good. . . . Thus all that Thou dost give me outside of Thyself, all Thou dost reveal to me concerning Thyself is too little and does not suffice me if I do not see Thee, if I do not possess Thee fully, resting in Thee alone."³ Such is the joy of heaven, always new, because its newness and its freshness do not pass and will last forever. For this reason we call it not only the future life but eternal life.

SOVEREIGNLY SPONTANEOUS LOVE SUPERIOR TO LIBERTY

In heaven the love of charity will take on new modalities; it will be a love of God superior to liberty, a love nothing will be able to make us lose, which nothing will be able in any way to diminish. On earth our love of God remains free, because we do not see God face to face. Under one aspect He appears very good to us, and under another He may appear too exacting; certain of His commandments may displease the egoism or pride that still remains in us. Consequently our love for Him remains free and at the same time meritorious.

In heaven, on the contrary, we shall see infinite Goodness as it is in itself. It will be impossible for us to find in it the slightest aspect that can displease us or alienate us; the slightest pretext for not loving it above all else, for preferring anything to it, or for suspending for a single instant our act of love in which there will be no shadow of weariness. Infinite Goodness, seen immediately, will so perfectly fill up our capacity to love, says St. Thomas, that it will draw our love irresistibly, more even than in ecstasy on earth where the love of God still remains free and meritorious. We shall be in the happy necessity of loving, say the Thomists.⁴

Here especially we see the measureless depths of our soul, particularly

³ Bk. III, chap. 21.

⁴ There will no longer be indifference of judgment, nor of will, the indifference existing in regard to every object, which appears good under one aspect and "not good or insufficient under another." Cf. Ia IIae, q. 10, a. 2.

of our will, of our capacity for spiritual love, which God alone seen face to face can fill.⁵

In heaven our love of God will, therefore, be supremely spontaneous, not at all forced, but no longer free; we shall be unable not to love God seen face to face. This love will of a certainty not be inferior to liberty and merit like a thoughtless and involuntary act of the sensible appetites; but it will be above liberty and merit like the very spontaneous love which God has for Himself from all eternity, and which is common to the three divine Persons. God necessarily loves His infinite goodness. For the same reason, like the beatific vision of which it will be the necessary consequence, our act of love of God will never be interrupted and will never more be able to lose any of its fervor.

Recently this lofty truth found expression in the writings of a person who has no human culture, but who seems to be advanced in the ways of prayer. "In heaven," she says, "the soul receives God into itself and being received by Him and in Him, it loses its liberty in Him, inasmuch as it is completely attracted by God, and gives itself up to the enjoyment of God with all its strength and all possible vigor. It possesses God and is possessed by Him, and it experiences this enjoyment as its eternal state." This state is always new in the sense that, like an eternal morning, its newness never fades.

THE IMPECCABILITY OF THE BLESSED

Another effect of the beatific vision is the impeccability of the blessed. They are impeccable not only because God preserves them from sin, as on earth He preserves saints confirmed in grace, but because a soul in possession of the beatific vision of infinite Goodness, cannot turn

⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia q. 105, a. 4: "Now the will can be moved by good as its object, but by God alone sufficiently and efficaciously. . . . God alone is the universal good. Wherefore He alone fills the capacity of the will, and moves it sufficiently as its object." Ia IIae, q. 4, a. 4: "Final happiness consists in the vision of the divine essence, which is the very essence of goodness. So that the will of him who sees the essence of God, of necessity loves whatever he loves, in subordination to God; just as the will of him who does not see God's essence, of necessity loves whatever he loves under that common notion of good which he knows."

Thomists commonly teach on Ia IIae, q. 4, a. 4: "The happy necessity of loving, even as far as its exercise, follows the beatific vision. The will of the blessed is completely filled, filled to capacity, filled to overflowing, and overwhelmed by the Sovereign Good clearly seen."

CROSS AND CROWN

away from it by mortal sin, or find the slightest pretext for loving it less for a single moment.⁸ Just as on earth man cannot cease to wish to be happy, although he often seeks happiness where it is not to be found, even at times in suicide, so in heaven the saints cannot cease to will to love God seen face to face, or to will to contemplate Him. However, they remain free to love some finite good, a certain soul in preference to another, to pray for it, and they freely execute God's orders in order to assist us. But this liberty never deviates in the direction of evil; it thus distantly resembles the divine liberty, which is at one and the same time supreme and impeccable. This was true even here on earth of the human liberty of Christ, who enjoyed the beatific vision from the first instant of His conception. But the free acts Jesus performed on earth were also meritorious, for He was still a traveler, *viator et comprehensor*, whereas the free acts of the blessed are no longer meritorious since they have reached the end of their journey and of merit. Their acts are the free acts of a soul confirmed in grace which has no longer anything to merit.

Since a soul that has been admitted to the beatific vision can not turn away from God, it follows that heavenly beatitude by reason of its very nature, cannot be lost. Scripture calls it "eternal life." Jesus says: "These [the wicked] shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting."⁷ St. Peter speaks of "a never fading crown of glory."⁸ St. Paul says that this crown is "incorruptible";⁹ and he also declares: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."¹⁰ The Credo ends with these words: "Credo . . . in vitam aeternam."

Angelicum
Rome

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⁸Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 4, a. 4, and the Commentaries of Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, Gonet, Billuart.

⁷Matt. 25:46.

⁸Cf. I Pet. 5:4.

⁹Cf. I Cor. 9:25.

¹⁰Cf. II Cor. 4:17.

The Wanton Stings

LIFE without pain and passion would be a rather dull affair. In fact, it would be something close to tragedy, since pain and passion give us so many occasions of laying up merit. Not that we ever need worry about being without conflict. With human nature shaped as it is, and with the wounds of original sin so manifest in our very vitals, we shall never want for grief and tears. Just so we keep an eye and ear open to the brighter side of things! After all, it is as natural to laugh as to cry. So long as man remains man, a balance of mind and matter, he must be able to see the humor as well as the pathos of life. This goes for all of us: saints and sinners, Jews and Gentiles. "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" Perish the thought of tickling father abbot merely to note how he would react. Or of wronging mother general in order to prove the rightness of Shylock's predictions. Yet, so surely as they are human beings, father abbot and mother general would tend to behave as Shylock says. Neither habit nor vows nor even the grace of God can change the essentials of human nature, though they often work miracles in moderating the actions of that nature. So that if priests and sisters felt no natural impulse to laugh or cry or wreak revenge, it might warrant some examination of their state of health.

What I am trying to say is that passion is as natural to man as eating and drinking. It is quite as natural as having a material side to his make-up; which is certainly the way almighty God made him. Without the body, there could be no passion in the proper sense of the word. But without the body, there could be no man, either. This has some startling implications.

For instance, have you ever stopped to think that you can be physically sick and sad at the sin in the world, but that an angel is not able to share this blessed kind of grief with you? Or that you can be stirred