

THE KEYS



Church of St. Peter the Apostle
Anglican Catholic Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic States
www.dmas-acc.org

The Rev. Canon Peter Geromel, OHI, DMin - Rector
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Fr. Seeley's Corner

The two great questions of the Christian faith

In the Christian faith we have redemption. Remission of our sins and access to Heaven. This is a truly wonderful and stupendous gift the Lord God has given us in Christ Jesus; but it does bring up two great questions:

The first great question is this:

Under Christ we have redemption of sin. There is no more debt. The price has been paid for our transgression; why then do we still have our fallen nature?

If sin has been forgiven why do we still labor under the punishment of Original Sin, even after it has been forgiven? Why do we have the ability to sin even after we have been forgiven?

The answer is this:

God will not save anyone who doesn't love Him. Those who love God, those who choose God will be with Him in heaven. Heaven is a place of love, and God cannot bring anyone there who does not choose to love Him: God would like everyone to go to heaven to be with Him but he can only let in those who love Him and who choose Him.

So he has left our natures damaged. He has forgiven our sins. He has promised to be our advocate and mediator. He has promised to assist us when we struggle, and to forgive any sins that we might commit... but we need to demonstrate our love for Him by following Jesus and carrying our cross.

He has even made us priests, like the priests of the Old Testament who offered sacrifices, so that the sacrifices which we offer in carrying our crosses are pleasing in His sight for our sanctification and that of our neighbors.

They are not in penance for our sins, but are pleasing sacrifices in his sight.

And we have the Eucharist where the sacramental priests of His testament can bring back, can renew His sacrifice on the cross, and remit our sins afresh. To give us new strength to follow Jesus.

But it brings up an important point:

If you live by faith, and have remission of your sins by the Church, and you carry your cross and follow Jesus. You have freedom. Your debt to God is paid, your debt to man is paid in that you are not bound to anyone for your past sins (nor the sins of your parents). You are free in Christ.

Thus have full control over our actions in regards to loving your neighbor and the benefit of your prayer.

This is why our natures are still damaged: so that we can love God by imitating his son, and love our neighbor by forgiving them as Jesus did.

Our natures are still damaged so that we might express our gratitude to God for his gift by offering Him our sufferings. Also, we are part of the plan of salvation of our neighbor. When we put up with our neighbor, our sufferings can benefit them.

As Jesus said to his Apostles today: whose sins you remit, they are remitted, and that is true for the sacramental priesthood certainly. It is also true for the common priesthood of the faithful. If you forgive your neighbor their sins against you, God can give your forgiveness to them

When you love and forgive your neighbor, your love and forgiveness benefits them.

Thus we have remission of our sins. We stand guiltless before God by baptism, faith in Jesus and frequenting the sacraments and carrying our cross.

We also have the ability to pardon our neighbor by forgiving him ourselves and offering our sufferings up to God, like the priests of the Old Testament: offerings for sin.

In the Old Testament an animal died so that sin might be forgiven. In the New Testament we die to ourselves that we might share in the divinity of Jesus, and that our neighbor might be forgiven their sin, and receive grace.

With the first question answered, we need to ask the second great question of the Christian faith.

Why, if Heaven is opened to us, why can we not see it?

Why, if we are able to go to Heaven, are we spiritually blind and unable to see Heaven: wouldn't it be much easier to aspire to Heaven if we could get a glimpse? Wouldn't it be easier to avoid the world, the flesh and the devil if we had some idea of what Heaven was like?

It's hard to hope in the next world when you have no idea what it's like.

The answer is simple but multifaceted as you might suspect:

First, Heaven is not something you can just see; it isn't a place in the sense that we understand: place.

It's not like you can get a travel brochure from Heaven showing you how nice it looks this time of year.

Or that Jesus can send you a postcard from Heaven saying "Heaven is lovely, wishing you were here, hope see you soon".

Now there are visions of Heaven in the Scriptures, but they are all bizarre and even obtuse.

The prophet Daniel states: *then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of: his body also was like a fine stone, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a many waters.*

He records seeing angels: seraphim in particular and his description stretches the imagination: *each had four wings, and four faces, and they were covered with eyes within and without, and with two wings they covered their body, and with two wings they covered their faces and with two wings they flew.*

In the Apocalypse or Revelation it states: *And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*

And of the Holy City in Revelation it's not any clearer:

And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

The descriptions almost make no sense, because they are a description of a spiritual reality, not truly comprehensible by earthly man.

So how do we know what Heaven is like?

Well what does it say in the final blessing in the Eucharist?

“The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in the knowledge and love of God and of His son Jesus Christ”.

Heaven is primarily an interior thing, like Jesus says *“if anyone love me my father and I will come and dwell with him, and we will build mansions within him... if it were not so I would have told you.”*

St. Teresa of Avila in the 16th century wrote a whole book about it: the interior castle.
The idea that as we love God and follow Jesus that we build an interior castle with God.

When Jesus says to his disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you” he means it, and Heaven exists, but it’s not something you can be shown at this moment: kind of like reality or the real world in the movie The Matrix: no one can be told what Heaven is, you have to go there and “see” it yourself.

This also goes to the idea of the interior garden that I developed for the winter newsletter. The more you nourish your interior garden with prayer, charity and the sacraments, the more you will understand what Heaven is.

Heaven is an interior thing. What does it consist of?

Joy, peace, love, and the awe of God. The peace which passes all understanding. We can get a taste of it when we love Jesus and follow Him. When we pray, or show charity.

This is really where the love of God and carrying your cross come in.

When we pray we can get a sense of the awe of God. This is what Heaven consists of.

When we love our neighbour, be it in our children, our family, friends, or someone we barely know, and they are grateful for our love and kindness; this also is a foretaste of Heaven.

There is an old saying among the Desert Fathers, which is slightly morbid, but gets right to the point. It says that if you saw Heaven, and then realized that all you had to do to get there was to die, that you would probably kill yourself, once you realized how wonderful Heaven is and how much of a pain life on earth is.

Now that’s an exaggeration, and rather misses the point, but you get the idea of what they’re saying.

Heaven is an interior thing, real but not tangible. Accessible only to those who seek it, and enjoyable only to those who love God and seek a greater knowledge and intimacy with Him.

You will notice that the question “whither goest thou?” is not asked by Jesus’ disciples, but by Jesus himself: saying, “I am leaving, why are none of you asking me where I am going?”

This is the depressing part, and it’s just as depressing for our parts and theirs: they were stuck on Jesus as they knew him, and were not prepared for the next stage of Jesus being gone, and the Holy Ghost coming.

And frankly, often neither are we.

We often wait on God to answer our prayers, and get upset that he does not, or wish that we felt closer to God and don’t take the time or make the effort to get closer, rather than seeing that he is empowering us to do what we need to do to answer those prayers, and giving us the strength to get closer to Him and bring His kingdom on earth and work to convert our fellow man.

This is the answer to the second great question, why can’t I see or feel Heaven, to which God responds:

I know it can be difficult, but have you tried?

I know in the midst of this world it can be a challenge, but have you looked?

I am happy to give it to you, but you are going to have to look for it.

News and Information

Wednesday, May 1, Mass at 6 pm for Sts Philip and James Day.

Rogation Monday, May 6th, Mass at 6 pm.

Rogation Tuesday, May 7th, TBD

Rogation Wednesday, May 8th, Mass at 6 pm.

Ascension Day, Thursday, May 9th, Mass at 12 Noon and 6 pm.

Vigil of Pentecost, May 18th, 5 pm.

Pentecost/Whitsunday, 8 am, 10 am, 6 pm.

Whitsun Monday, May 20th, Mass at 6 pm.

Whitsun Tuesday, May 21st, TBD

Whitsun Wednesday/Ember Day, May 22nd, Mass at 6 pm.

Whitsun Thursday, May 23rd, Mass at 12 Noon.

May 29th, Vestry Meeting 7:30 pm with Mass at 7 pm.

NEW SERVICE on Sundays at 6 PM. Saturday evening mass canceled until further notice, Except Pentecost Eve.

MAY, 2024						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
LEGEND: HC - Holy Communion; FHE – Festal Holy Eucharist; HE - Holy Eucharist; SS – Sunday School; PG - Prayer Group; EP – Evening Prayer; MP – Morning Prayer; P&HU – Prayers and Holy Unction			[1] 6:00 p.m. HC	[2] 12 noon HC	[3]	[4]
[5] 10:00 a.m. MP 6:00 p.m. EP & HC ROGATION SUNDAY	[6] 6:00 p.m. HC ROGATION MONDAY	[7] ROGATION TUESDAY	[8] 6:00 p.m. HC ROGATION WEDNESDAY	[8] 12 noon HC 6:00 p.m. HC ASCENSION	[10]	[11]
[12] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS 6:00 p.m. EP & HC SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION	[13]	[14]	[15] 6:00 p.m. HC	[16] 12 noon HC	[17]	[18] 5:00 p.m. Vigil of Pentecost
[19] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS 6:00 p.m. EP & HC WHITSUNDAY	[20] 6:00 p.m. HC WHITSUN MONDAY	[21] WHITSUN TUESDAY	[22] 6:00 p.m. HC WHITSUN WEDNESDAY	[23] 12 noon HC WHITSUN THURSDAY	[24]	[25]
[26] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS 6:00 p.m. EP & HC TRINITY SUNDAY	[27]	[28]	[29] 7:00 pm HC 7:30 pm Vestry	[30] 12 noon HC	[31]	

IN THE LORD'S SERVICE

If you cannot fulfill your assigned duty because of an urgent reason, PLEASE SECURE A REPLACEMENT.

	May 5	May 12	May 19	May 26	June 2
Coffee Hour	B. Von Claparede	M. Slayton	E. Paisley	C. Pappas	G. Terrell
Epistoler 8 a.m.	D. Drysdale	D. Drysdale	C. Von Claparede	D. Drysdale	C. Von Claparede
Epistoler 10 a.m.	T. Paisley	G. Terrell	T. Paisley	P. Williams	P. Williams

Altar servers and ushers will be assigned as available before each service.

2024 Vestry (term end): George Mauney ('25), Lisa Olver ('24), Ted Paisley ('24), Mike Slayton ('25), George Terrell ('26), Vicki Williams ('26)