

Temple and the Presence of God



V. THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE



Solomon: Prophet of the Heavenly City

You have bid me build a temple on your holy mountain and an altar in the city that is your dwelling place, a copy of the holy tabernacle which you had established from of old **[Wisdom 9:8]**.

- † From the beginning, God's Revelation defined the Temple as a figure of something Heavenly [Psalm 15:1; 48:2-3; 2 Chronicles 6:18; 2 Samuel 7:13]
- † The Heavenly Temple (Heavenly Jerusalem) was created by God at the same time as Paradise, hence, *in aeternum*

The Sign



In this way the holy Spirit shows that the way into the sanctuary had not yet been revealed while the outer tabernacle still had its place [Hebrews 9:8].

- † The Holy of Holies was divided from the rest of the Jerusalem Temple by a veil, woven of four colors; no one passed through, except the high priest, once a year
- † This annual repetition shows it's only a symbolic gesture, a sign, something that points to a goal as yet unattained
- † The Holy Spirit reveals the ultimate goal: the Heavenly Temple [See Hebrews 9:8]

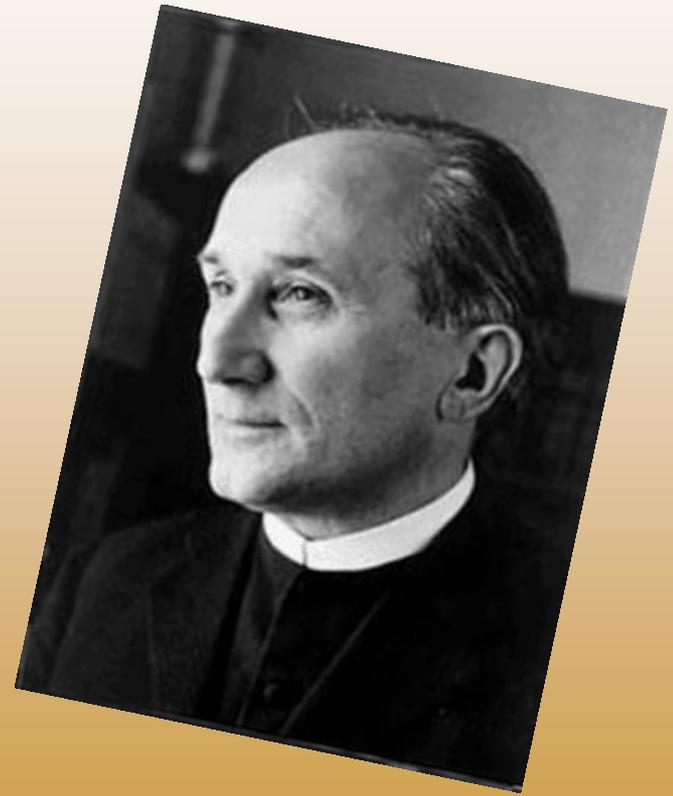
Heavenly Temple: Eternal

“This building now built in your midst is not that which is revealed with Me, that which was prepared beforehand here from the time when I took counsel to make Paradise, and showed Adam before he sinned, but when he transgressed the commandment it was removed from him, as also Paradise” [2 Baruch 4:3].

† “The world becomes apprehensible as world, as cosmos, in the measure in which it reveals itself as a sacred world.”
[Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*].

Guardini: The Church and the Heavenly City

The Church was willed by Christ, born of the Holy Spirit, and she will endure, have a destiny, suffer and be renewed, again and again, until the end of history, and then she will be transformed into what Revelation calls 'the heavenly city.' [Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Lord* (1965), p. 5]



The Church as Heavenly City

The Church is conceived as imitating the Heavenly Jerusalem ...It also reproduces Paradise or the celestial world" [Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 61].

Look to the east, Jerusalem; see the joy that comes to you from God! [Baruch 4:36].

- ✚ Church design symbolizes the 4 cardinal directions
- ✚ Interior is the universe
- ✚ Altar is Paradise which lays to the East
- ✚ West is the realm of darkness
- ✚ The center is the earth
- ✚ As a copy of the cosmos the Church incarnates and sanctifies the world



“...he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight [Acts 1:9].

Sign and Reality

- ✝ The Jerusalem Temple - the Temple itself, high priest, veil, entry...all are signs, figures of something to come
- ✝ The signs point to the one reality: the consummation of the work of salvation, the final “entry” of Jesus Christ, humanity's high priest, into the Heavenly Temple at the Ascension

The Reality

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption [Hebrews 9:11-12].

- † These words (Hebrews), charged with mystery, describe history's greatest act
- † The action of the Mass is a sacramental possession:
"...command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high..."
[Roman Missal: 1st Eucharistic Prayer]

The Reality



“And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders...and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God”

[Revelation 7:11].

- ✝ Ascension: the consummation of the *Mystery of Salvation*
- ✝ Christ, the High Priest, represents humanity, and the whole of human nature is finally brought into the Heavenly Temple
- ✝ With Jesus we enter the *pleroma* - the *Glory* in which dwells the Holy Trinity
- ✝ This unity of heavenly spirits, without division, is the total and proper Dwelling of Divinity

St. Gregory of Nyssa



“There was a time when the chorus of spiritual creatures was one, all looking towards the single leader and putting forth the harmony of their dances, following the measure given by Him. But the Fall supervened, marring that inspired harmony. It was a cause of stumbling to the first men who danced amid the angelic powers.”

The Ascension

“Then he led them [out] as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. They did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God [Luke 24:50-53].

- † What was the immediate reaction of the disciples after Jesus left them and ascended?
- † They were full of joy
- † Interesting? The world hadn't changed; they'd been given a seemingly impossible task; and Jesus was gone
- † Their message? This Jesus, this worldly failure, is the Redeemer of all humanity
- † Why are they joyful?

The Ascension

“...[the cloud] presents Jesus' departure, not as a journey to the stars, but as His entry into the mystery of God. It evokes and entirely different order of magnitude, a different dimension of being [Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part 2, p. 282*].

- † Disciples convinced of a new Presence of Jesus - in a new and powerful way [Matthew 28:16-20]
- † Jesus hasn't departed into some remote heavenly region; His continuing closeness is a lasting joy
- † “a cloud took him from their sight” [Acts 1:9] - “cloud” of Annunciation, Transfiguration, Sinai Temple, wilderness...
- † But where has Jesus gone?

The Ascension

...he went off to the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was far out on the sea and he was alone on shore. Then he saw that they were tossed about while rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea [Mark 6:46-48]

- † Jesus hasn't gone to some distant place in the cosmos where God sits on His throne
- † God is beyond space, not of it; His is a divine, not a spatial or a temporal, presence
- † Jesus sitting "at God's right hand" is participating in this divine dominion over space
- † He hasn't gone away in a human sense: "I go away, and will come to you" [John 14:28].
- † It is a continuing Presence; hence a source of joy

The 100th Sheep

- ✠ The angels keep watch at the heavenly gates, awaiting the return of humanity, the 100th sheep
- ✠ The Ascension, then, is the return of the lost sheep borne on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd
- ✠ In this the angels joyfully hail Christ, who conquers death, who brings humanity back into the chorus, once again complete

“And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray [Matthew 18:13].

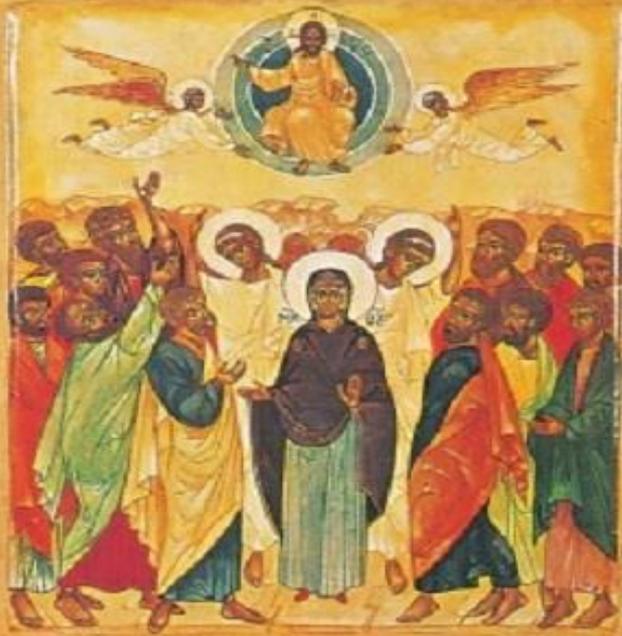


“For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf”
[Hebrews 9:24].

Its Meaning

- † It is no longer the high priest who is admitted once a year to a sign of the *real* Holy of Holies
- † Humanity as a whole now dwells there permanently
- † It means that salvation is irreversibly achieved, that it's no longer exposed to a Fall; no relapse is possible
- † Why? Because the very Son of God is the means through which humanity is united with Divinity

Fulfillment



THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end”
[Nicene Creed]

- † The Ascension and its uniting of humanity with the Divine freed us from the false concept of eternal recurrence (His Kingdom will have no end...) [Luke 1:33]
- † This essentially pagan concept was applied by some as an eternal cycle of salvation and relapse
- † The Christian, then, receives hope, sure confidence in the Word of God who never fails
- † The Divine plan is fulfilled, the world achieves its end, its object, its meaning



“So shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it” [Isaiah 55:11].

Time and Eternity

- † It is “by His own Blood” that Christ enters the heavenly sanctuary and eternity
- † We are, then, at the end of all times
- † Salvation is achieved for all time - beyond time, for eternity - through the sacrifice of the Lamb
- † This is why the sacrifice of the Lamb is compatible and sufficient (coextensive) with all periods of history...why it fills Holy Week our living, liturgical memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus



Sacrificial Lamb

- † *Revelation* presents us with the same scene of the entry into the Heavenly Temple, with dramatic effect
- † The angels seem to expect the Lion of Judah, the triumphant King - and instead a sacrificial Lamb appears

“Then I saw standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb that seemed to have been slain. He had seven horns and seven eyes; these are the [seven] spirits of God sent out into the whole world” [Revelation 5:6].

Heavenly Astonishment

“The Angels of Earth went in procession and demanded that the celestial gates should be opened to Him, so that He might be glorified afresh. But He was not recognized, clothed as He was in the shabby garment of our nature, His tattered clothes bedraggled with human grime” [St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ascensionem*].

- † Gregory of Nyssa describes the angelic astonishment
- † Something new introduced into the celestial choir: the red robe of the redeemed mingling with the white robe of the heavenly host
- † Into the Heavenly Temple come the Martyrs bathed in the Blood of the Lamb, in which the whole church is steeped
- † The Angels now recognize that humanity shares in the Passion of Christ

Christ and Us

- † Humanity's place is now in heaven
- † Man dwells there already through Christ, who became one of us
- † Christ dwells there as the Head of the Mystical Body
- † Christ dwells there through the glorified Church

“And so God becomes the Temple of man and man becomes the Temple of God” [St. Peter Damian, *Letters*].



“My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours” [Luke 15:31].

God is Our Temple

- ✝ Now, between God and us there exists a mutual indwelling, a communion, in which our hunger is satisfied and our joy filled
- ✝ The eternal relationship between Father and Son [John 17:10] is also eternally true between the Father and His adopted children
- ✝ We return to the Father's house and are filled

Heavenly Liturgy

“When he took it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones” [Revelation 5:8].

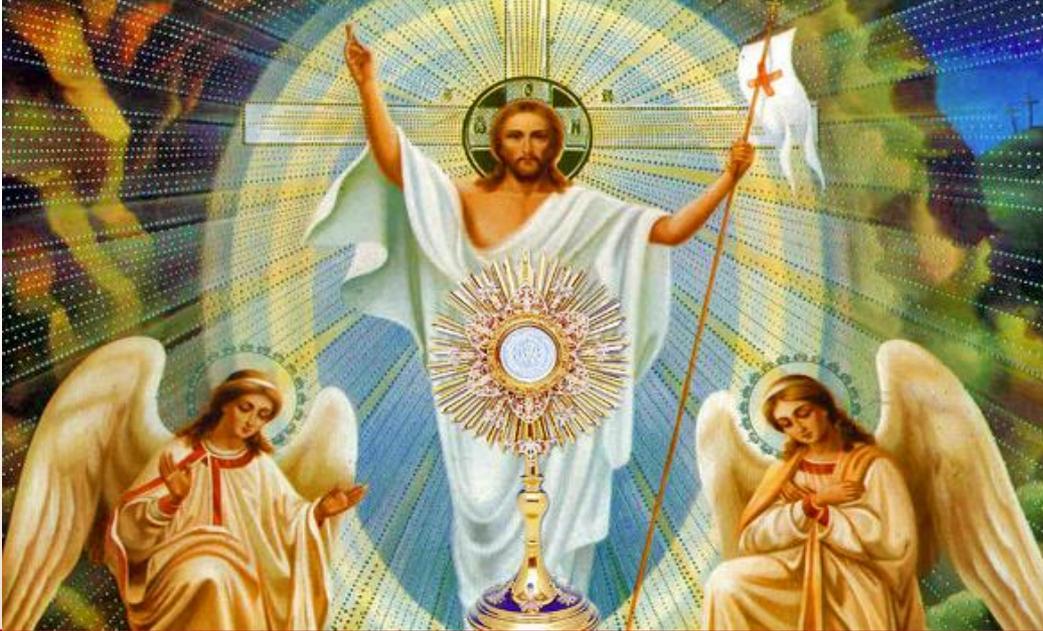
- ✝ It is in the Heavenly Temple, no longer in the Temple of stone, that we pray the Heavenly Liturgy, described by St. John in Revelation [Revelation 5:8-14]



Heavenly Liturgy

“The Mass is open to heaven, and this is why the angels are present. It is filled with the echo of their songs, from the *Gloria* of the Nativity to the *Sanctus* of the hidden Mystery”
[Jean Danielou].

- ✝ We share in the Heavenly Liturgy at Mass, which is the real Presence of the heavenly event abstracted from time, but placed sacramentally in space and time
- ✝ It is the same reality symbolized by the high priest entering the Holy of Holies, fulfilled by the entry of Christ into heaven on Ascension Day
- ✝ It is possessed invisibly (veiled) on earth under the Eucharistic species, and is the entry of human nature into the Heavenly Temple



“...Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation...” [Hebrews 9:11].

Our Entry

- ✠ Humanity's entry into the Heavenly Temple, if achieved for all, if already real for every member, must still be gained by each
- ✠ The present “economy,” although real, is itself a figure in relation to the consummation of all things
- ✠ Unlike the Mosaic Temple, it is real, but still veiled



Waiting...

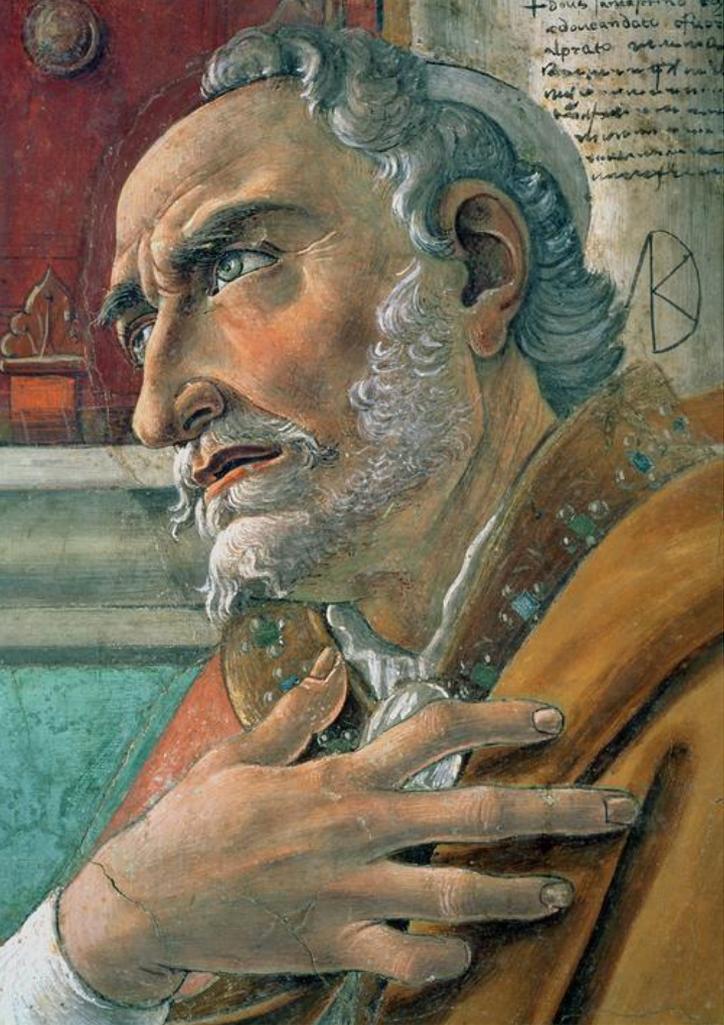
But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself"
[Philippians 3:20-21].

We Await...

- † We exist in prophecy...waiting
- † The real life, the real dwelling, is elsewhere

So we are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.
[2 Corinthians 5:6].

Total Presence



St. Augustine wrote:
"Pondus meum, amor
meus" - "My weight is
my love." [*The
Confessions*]

- † God's Presence is like something deep within us, a weight we can sense, that attracts us to Him
- † Augustine recognized this, realizing that we become, are transformed by, what we love
- † Love is within us because we are created in God's image - by God who is love
- † But the love within us can be disordered, directed towards transitory, earthly things
- † A soul that loves heavenly things becomes heavenly itself

After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches* in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from* our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb"
[Revelation 7:9-10].

Our Advance...

- † John's vision depicts humanity, all its variety, as in a procession, advancing toward the Heavenly Temple
- † As Christians our lives, then, are lives of waiting to advance
- † We know and feel acutely the pains and sorrows of our condition, but know, too, that we are made for far greater things



If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better [Philippians 1:22-23].

Preparing...

- ✦ The worldly will grasp desperately at the ephemeral pleasures and possessions of this life
- ✦ But for Paul, the Christian aspires to be relieved of the weight of this material life and its servitude
- ✦ He lives detached and free, using what time he is given to carry out God's mandate to extend God's love to all

[See 2 Corinthians 5:8-10] 29



For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory [Colossians 3:3-4].

Hidden Life

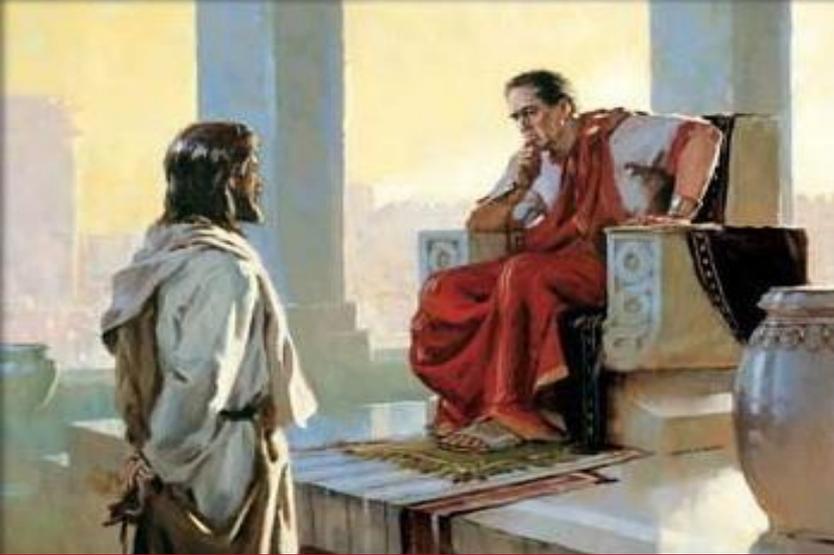
- † The Christian lives in the world, and does not hide from the world, but realizes it is only a beginning
- † The world is a vessel, a crucible, in which the human soul is formed to God's will
- † But the Christian life is still a hidden life, in that it will not be revealed until the consummation of all



...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials [1 Peter 1:4,6].

Life of Christ

- † The Christian desires only to make the Life of Christ grow in himself and others
- † The world becomes a place for “making gods” - where we prepare to share in the divine life
- † So we must take part in the struggles of the world, but not for their own sake, for God's glory
- † For the salvation of many souls are bound up with life's temporal conditions



Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here"
[John 18:36].

Perfect Kingdom

- † As Jesus instructed Pilate, there can be no perfect human city; only the City of God is perfect
- † But we should not devalue the realities of this life, nor suppress the instinct for life
- † This thinking only leads to the pagan ideal returning to a primordial "stream of life"
- † For us death is the full reality of all which we lived imperfectly on earth
- † We wait for it but fruitfully



“It is to prepare himself for this solemn act, which is the entry of every man into the Heavenly Temple, through the veil that still conceals it, that man's whole life must be devoted” [Jean Danielou].

Life's Focus

- † For us there is a continuity between our earthly life as Christians and its eternal consummation
- † But it is a most serious act for us to “ratify” our detachment from mortality and then focus on (cling to) eternal life
- † Not that we can change anything, for we cannot deny what has always been our life...and so we will reap its fruits



The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord [Isaiah 11:2].

Life's Focus

- † Our life, then, is a kind of apprenticeship, learning the rudiments of what God expects of us
- † We are to develop the prayer life that will later be the "conversation in heaven" with God and His angels
- † We must strive not to be so immersed in the world of time and space, but acclimate ourselves to heavenly things through the gifts of the Holy Spirit [See also 1 Corinthians 12]

“...the Church is the Body of Christ. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, received in Baptism, we are mystically united to the Lord as members of one body, of which he is the head. The image of the mystical body makes us realize the importance of strengthening our union with Christ through daily prayer, the study of God's word and participation in the sacraments [Pope Francis, 21 June 2013].

Life's Focus

- † This apprenticeship is of more than our life with God; it is also of our life together
- † In death is revealed the mystery of this unity
- † As our glorified body is hidden beneath the appearance of our earthly body, the mystical body (the unity of humanity) is hidden beneath the appearance of the visible Church



**"Unless you eat the
Flesh of the Son of
man and drink His
Blood, you have no life
in you; he who eats My
Flesh and drinks My
Blood has eternal life."
[John 6:53]**

Today's Signs

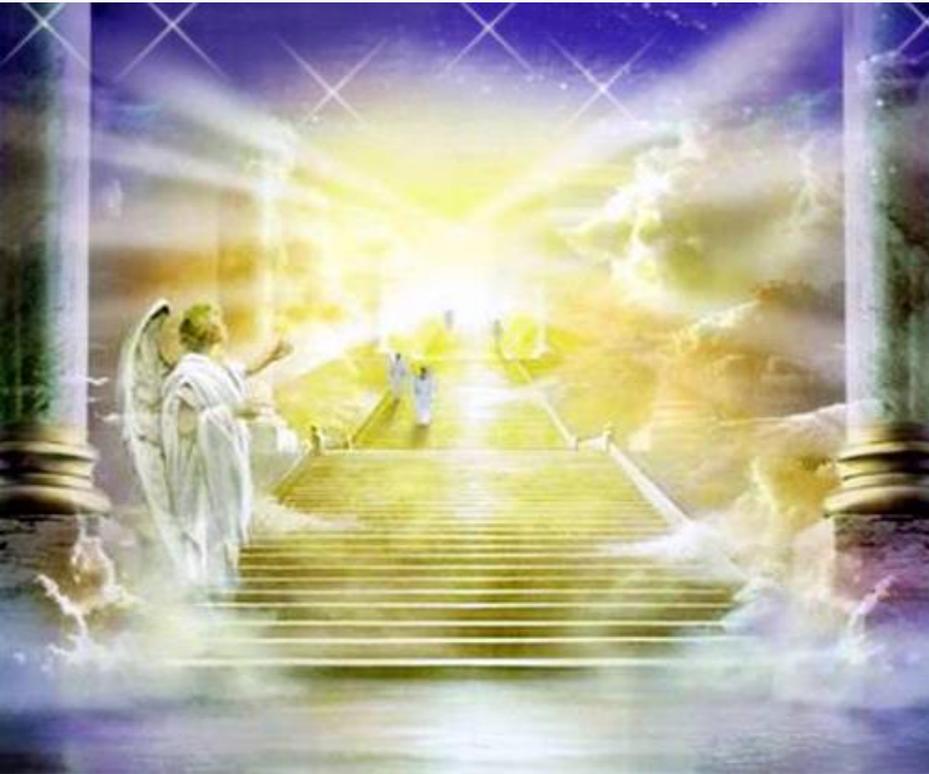
- † Two signs of humanity's decadence: corruption of death; and rupture of unity
- † Our return to our true condition - that which God desires for us - will be marked by the restoration of incorruptibility and unity
- † Of this the Eucharist is both sign and instrument
- † It is *viatic* (of the journey) - the bread of the traveler, God's presence within - until he reaches home: eternal life

Eucharist: Sign of Eternal Life

“What the Church celebrates as Mass is not the Last Supper; no it is what the Lord instituted in the course of the Last Supper and entrusted to the Church: the memorial of His sacrificial death” [Josef Jungmann, *The Mass*].

- ✠ With the Eucharist, the new worship is established which brings the Temple sacrifices to an end.
- ✠ At the Last Supper, Jesus offers a prayer of thanksgiving, giving thanks that His prayer was “heard” [Hebrews 5:7], thanking God in advance that the Father does not abandon Him in death
- ✠ He gives thanks for the gift of Resurrection, that He could already give His Body and Blood (as bread and wine) as a pledge of Resurrection and eternal life [John 6:53-58]

Heavenly Temple



- ✝ In the eternity of the Heavenly Temple there is no Temple other than God Himself, the Lamb
- ✝ This is the final word of the Revelation given to the Church concerning the mystery of the Temple and God's Presence

" I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb. [Revelation 21:22-23]

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me. I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne [Revelation 3:20-21].

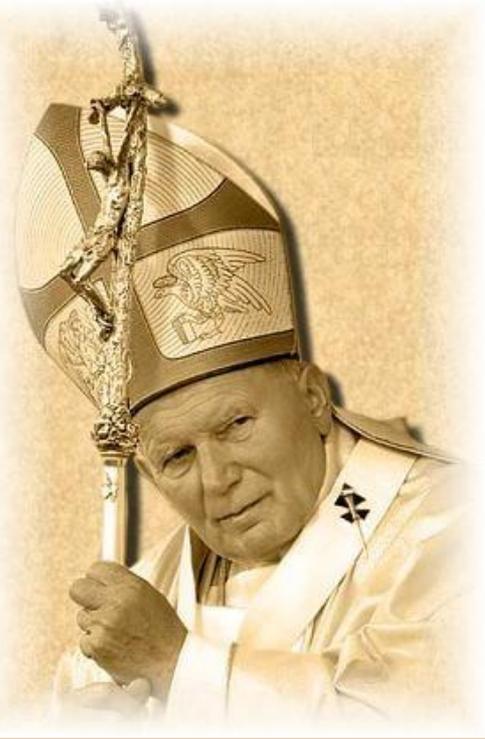
Heavenly Temple

- † The eternal Temple of the faithful is God Himself in His sovereign reign (*Pantocrator*)
- † For the prophets God was present where He reigned
- † God is Present in His Temple because He dwells in Himself and His holy will

Eternal Life

“Eternal Life” is not - as the modern reader might immediately assume - life after death, in contrast to this present life, which is transient and not eternal. “Eternal life” is life itself, real life, which can also be lived in the present age and is no longer challenged by physical death. This is the point: to seize “life” here and now, real life that can no longer be destroyed by anything or anyone [Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part 2*, p. 82-83]

Some Final Thoughts



“One of the roots of the hopelessness that assails many people today is...their inability to see themselves as sinners and to allow themselves to be forgiven, an inability often resulting from the isolation of those who, by living as if God did not exist, have no one from whom they can seek forgiveness.” [Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003)]

- ✝ We can so easily get caught up in the world, in our wills, forgetting that God's will is that we achieve salvation.
- ✝ He offers us mercy and forgiveness, “tickets” along with faith and repentance that provide us entry into the Heavenly Temple.