



# Theology Corner

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## **The Creed: “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.”**

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This line of the Creed professes our belief in the Ascension of Christ. What is the importance of Ascension? It is important for both Christ *and* for us. A lot of people usually only consider what it means for them, but I think it is beneficial to understand the need for Christ himself to ascend. We know that the Son was “sent” by the Father for a specific mission. But once the mission was completed, there was a necessary *return* to the Father to his rightful place. In other words, while Christ condescended into the world for a specific purpose, once “*it is finished*” (John 19:30), the Son needed to return to his natural place of which he takes his origin. This aspect of origin is especially helpful to consider here. When we speak of the Trinity – three persons of one divine essence – the three persons are only distinct in their relation to each other. Since the Son is related to the Father as the one who was begotten, his origin is from the Father since he quite literally emanated from the Father as knowledge. Now, since the Son originated from the Father, it was necessary that he should return to the Father in glory seated at his right hand (exalted to his rightful place *with* the Father). This makes clear what Christ is saying here: “*I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.*” (John 16:28).

What is especially interesting is that while Christ ascends into heaven as the eternal Son of God, he also ascends as true man in glorified body as the victor over sin and death. As the Catechism states, “Christ’s Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain.” (CCC, 665). Now that we know what this means for Christ, what does this mean for us? Well, just as the Ascension marks the entrance of the humanity of Jesus into heaven, as the new Adam, Jesus also opens up the possibility for all of humanity to reach heaven as well. This is because Christ’s Ascension into heaven makes him the supernatural “head” of humanity. Following from this, all of the members of this head (the body of Christ – the Church), are also given a participation in God through a life of grace as our humanity was elevated.

The second part of this concerns judgment. Here, we profess our belief in who the judge *is*, and who are *to be* judged. It is established that Christ is the judge; this is fitting both because he is God who is the ultimate Judge, and also because he is man and thus the exemplar (model) for all of humanity. St. Thomas Aquinas also brings up an interesting point as to why Christ is rightly understood as the Judge of humanity. He says, “it is necessary that those who are judged may see the judge. But the Godhead is so delightful that no one could behold it without great enjoyment; and hence the damned are not permitted to see the Judge; nor in consequence to enjoy anything.” (*On the Creed*). So, with Christ as the Judge, all of humanity is able to see God in the form of man in his glorified body to judge even the wicked.

Who will be judged? All of the living and the dead will be judged of the past, present, and future sins. But some do not require judgment in the proper sense. For example, among the wicked, those who have rejected the faith completely are already judged, “*He who does not believe is condemned already.*” (John 3:18). But there are the wicked who will be judged such as those who have accepted the faith, but departed from it through sin. Among the good, some will not need to be judged. For example, those who were in a state of sanctifying grace with no sin (mortal or venial sin) on their soul. But there will be some among the good who are both saved and judged according to their venial sin. Now, there are important distinctions between *particular judgment* at the time of death and *general judgment* at the end of time. This credal affirmation clearly involves general judgment. I will be discussing the details of each type of judgment in the near future. Stay tuned!