



# Theology Corner

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## “What does the Church teach about Death?”

Death is a very interesting topic when approached from the aspect of theology. Intuitively, death is seen from a negative point of view. For example, the death of a loved one is always heartbreaking. While there is surely a negative aspect to death, there is also a much more positive one tied to it. We know that from the *philosophical* perspective, the powers of our human soul involve immaterial operations (e.g., rationality), which suggests the subsistence (carrying on of existence) of the soul apart from the body in death. From the more complete *theological* perspective, we know that through death we can rise to life in a more complete sense due of the merits of Christ.

Let us first consider a few things about death. It is helpful to realize that death is natural to all living things with a material principle – plants die, animals die, and humans die. In other words, anything that is generated in the world is subject to corruption. But since human beings were created in grace (in paradise), we were supernaturally given a life without death. Thus, from this perspective, we see death as a bad thing insofar as death entered the world through the sin of Adam (leading to the expulsion from paradise). By this first sin, man fell from grace and was essentially placed into a state of pure nature. But because of the love of God and his will to unite us to himself, he sent his only Son whose redeeming act on the cross atoned for our sins and made it such that we can, through death, rise to life.

I think it is important to consider that God always takes an evil and brings about something good from it. Recalling the words of St. Ambrose, Pope Benedict XVI quoted in *Spe Salvi* saying that while “death was not decreed from the beginning, God prescribed it as a remedy.” In other words, by meriting redemption for humanity, God transformed the consequences of our human death (which was originally a bad thing), into a pathway to experience a complete union with God in heaven. Contrary to popular belief, death is not a path to nothingness. In death, we can be said to truly live inasmuch as we are united with the source of life itself, living a more authentic life than ever before! The goodness for which our wills constantly yearn for on earth is only satisfied in a limited way so as to bring about a happiness that is incomplete. Because of this, we no longer want to go on living indefinitely on this earth, since that would be a case in which we never possess that for which we were created.

So, for those who are grieving, I want to say, “Do not lose hope!” For we can have great hope that our loved ones are in the loving embrace of our Lord. While some of our loved ones are no longer with us physically here on earth, we can imagine them as finally obtaining their ultimate end which can be thought of, as Benedict XVI also says, “like plunging into the ocean of infinite love” for all eternity. In heaven, we are fully healed in the fullness of grace, without any corruption whatsoever. The flesh is dead no longer but resurrected and transformed gloriously in participation of the victory of Jesus Christ.

For everyone still living, I want to say, “Live every day like it is your last!” This statement in common parlance is usually meant to communicate the idea of fulfilling all of your desires every single day. But what I mean here is that we should approach every moment with the end in mind – are we living in such a way that if we were to die at this very moment, would we be with God? If not...make changes now! Become a real disciple of Christ. Go to confession. Remain always in a state of grace, for we never know the day or the hour and it will come at an hour that you won't expect. (Matthew 24:36-44). Don't let bodily death be a pathway to spiritual death. Instead, cling to the Resurrection as that remedy through which in death, comes life everlasting!