

## What happens after death and before the general resurrection?

What does the Church teach about our lives during the interval between our death and the general resurrection? This period of time, which could last eons, seems like it could be pretty dull without a body and the senses that go with it. How will we "see," "touch," "taste," etc. without our senses? What will we do? Sort of float around in space?

Thank you for these interesting questions. The experience of the reality of eternal life will blow the doors off our feeble attempts to put it into words now. As St. Paul says, "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Yet, we can make some observations based on Scripture and the constant teaching of the Church:

(1) When we die, we individually undergo what is known as the "particular judgment." In this judgment, our immortal soul receives its eternal retribution based on our faith and works. This means either entrance into heaven (immediately or after purgatory) or hell. See [Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1021-22](#).

(2) "After death, which is the separation of the body and the soul, the body becomes corrupt while the soul, which is immortal, goes to meet the judgment of God and awaits its reunion with the body when it will rise transformed at the time of the return of the Lord. *How* the resurrection of the body will come about exceeds the possibilities of our imagination and understanding" (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 205; see also [Catechism, nos. 997-1001](#)).

(3) Since, at least from our present perspective, there is a lapse of time—and possibly a large lapse of time or "eons"—between our particular judgment and the resurrection of our bodies at the general resurrection at the end of the world, the question does arise about what happens in the meantime. For one thing, after death we enter eternity, which literally is a dimension outside of time. As the Psalmist writes, to the Lord a thousand years are as yesterday (Ps. 90:4). So on that basis alone it's difficult to maintain that this interim period would be experienced as a long wait.

(4) Further, we have the assurance of faith that the souls of the just are with the Lord, who is our "all in all." Therefore, the souls of the saints in heaven are already experiencing the fullness of life with God, and it assuredly is not dull. Rather, it is the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

(5) It is true that human beings are embodied creatures and we are made to take in our environment through our senses. However, in the life to come, bodies are, in a sense, optional. The holy angels experience the presence of God and surpass in perfection all visible creatures. Yet angels do not have bodies. See [Catechism, nos. 328 and following](#).

So, while we can't know in this life exactly what the next life will be like, we can say that the experience of the soul in heaven prior to the resurrection of the body is one of happiness beyond our wildest expectation, and not one characterized by "limitation" or some sort of suspended animation.

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