

Saint Thomas Aquinas

1225 circa - 1274

PARADISE

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote about the beatitude of the saints and their doings in question 93 of his *Summa Theologica*: “It is evident that the beatitude of the saints increased in extent after the resurrection of the body: because at that point the beatitude will not only be in the soul, but also in the body. However, the very beatitude of the soul will have an increase in extent: since the soul will not just enjoy its own well-being but also that of the body.

Better still, one can even say that the beatitude of the soul itself will increase in intensity. In fact, the human body can be considered from two points of view: first, in which the body is a perfectible part of the soul; second, the body is an obstacle to the operations of the soul, which does not allow itself to be in complete perfection with the soul. Considering it from the first point of view the union of the body and soul brings a state of perfection to the soul. Since every part is imperfect until it becomes complete in its state of wholeness: so that the wholeness is to the part as form is to matter. Therefore, also the soul is perfect in its natural existence as a part of the whole, and not separate, meaning composed of body and soul together. Nevertheless, from the second point of view, the addition of the body impedes the perfection of the soul; from this idea come the words of knowledge:

“The body that corrupts itself aggravates the soul”. If therefore, if the body can eliminate anything that resists the action of the soul, the soul will be in a more absolute sense of perfection existing in the body rather than existing separately. The more something is perfect within itself, the more it is able to function perfectly. Therefore, the operations of the soul united to such a body will be more perfect than the separated soul. However, such a body must be a glorious body that is in complete submission of the spirit. So the beatitude of the soul’s functionality, will be more perfect after it assumes its part in the body: in fact as the soul separates from a corrupt body it can act with more perfection than when it was joined with the body, but when it returns to the glorious body, the soul will be more, even more perfect than when it was separate. Every imperfect being desires to reach its peak of perfection. Therefore, the separate soul naturally yearns to reconnect with the body. Because of this yearning, which originates from a state of imperfection, the operations of the soul are less intense and not as close to God. This is why Saint Augustine affirms, “The body’s desires slow down the soul’s tendencies to lean towards a high level of goodness”. (The followers of St. Thomas Aquinas are unanimous in maintaining that Saint Thomas came to reject this conclusion when he got older. In I-II, question 4 to 5 he writes: “with



the reconnection to the body the beatitude does not grow in intensity but rather grows in extent”).

The Roman Missal recalls Saint Thomas Aquinas as “a priest of the Order of Preachers and a Doctor of the Church, who used his supreme gift of intellect to transmit his extraordinary knowledge to others through discourse and writings. On his way to Lyon, to participate in the Ecumenical Council with Pope Gregory X, he died on March 7 in the monastery of Fossanova”.

