

Glorified bodies

The same body

Not only will your body be brought back to be reunited with the soul, but it will be the same body to which the soul was united before death. As St. Paul declared: *"This corruptible body must put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality."* (I Corinthians 15:33)

All men and women will appear before the judgment seat of Christ with their own bodies, to give an account of their deeds. During this life, whatever one has done (good or bad), has formed the whole Man (body, soul, spirit). It is right, therefore, that both body and soul should share in the reward or punishment in the life to come.

The risen body will be the same body you had in this life, in the sense that the body you have now is the same body you had 20 years ago. Even though the body is subject to constant change, e.g. of growing or aging, it is the same body. Science tells us that the individual cells that make up our bodies are constantly being replaced by others, so that those that make up our body now are not the same as those of 20 years ago. Yet, in spite of this, the overall identity of your body persists. In this sense, the body you have now, you will have in the life to come, in eternity.

Yet vastly changed

While the risen body will be the same body as you have now, it will be brought back in a vastly changed condition. The bodies of all (the elect and the damned) will be incorruptible, i.e. no longer subject to death and corruption as they are now. The soul was created immortal; after the general resurrection, the body too will be immortal, to the joy of the elect and the anguish of the condemned.

The risen body will no longer be subject to constant change, e.g. of growth or aging, as in this life. All nutritive functions will cease, because in that state it will no longer have need of them. The body will no longer need food, or drink, or sleep to sustain life and strength as in the present life. It is true that Jesus in His glorified body ate fish in the presence of the apostles, but He did this to show that He had bodily risen from the dead, and not because He had need of it.

Approximately one third of the hours of each day are spent sleeping. And how much time and concern are given to the providing, preparing and partaking of food. Grain must be planted and harvested, hauled to market, and the final product merchandised. Sheep and cattle must be raised, etc. All this and more to provide food and clothing for our mortal bodies. After the general resurrection, all this labour and concern will be no more. In the risen body all generative functions will cease.

On one occasion the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the body, tried to trip Jesus up by asking Him about the woman who had seven husbands. Which of them, they asked, will be her husband in the next life. To this Jesus answered: *"At the resurrection they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but are as angels of God in Heaven."* (Mark 12:18ff) Since in this life the body is subject to death and corruption, the generative function is necessary for the continuation of the human race. In Heaven, however, the bodies of the just will be incorruptible and immortal, with no possibility of the human race ceasing to exist.

At what stage of life will the risen bodies be brought back? Some people die in infancy, some in middle age, some in old age. At what stage of development will they be at the resurrection of the dead? In all likelihood, regardless of bodily condition or stage of growth at the time of death, all will be brought back at the stage of perfect development, in the prime of life, the age of perfection (33 - Christ's age when He was crucified), a condition that will remain for all eternity. Furthermore, the body will be without any defects it had in this life. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk, the deformed or retarded will no longer be so.

The testimony of St Paul

What we have said so far applies to all risen bodies - the elect and the condemned. The bodies of the elect, however, will be endowed with certain qualities which the lost souls will not have. St. Paul reveals more about this than anyone else. In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote: *"Perhaps someone will say 'How are the dead to be raised up? What kind of a body will they have.' A nonsensical question! The seed you sow does not germinate unless it dies. When you sow, you do not sow a full-blown plant, but a kernel of wheat or some other grain. God gives body to it as He pleases - to each seed its own fruition."* (15:35)

St. Paul is comparing our body in this life to a kernel of grain, and the full blossom to our body in the next life. But to blossom forth, one must die. What it will blossom into, depends on how we live our life in this world. Then St. Paul enumerates certain qualities that the glorified bodies will have in the next life, as compared to the body in this life. Speaking of the body, and continuing the figure of the seed sown and the full blossom or fruit, he says: *"What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable. What is sown is ignoble, but what is raised is glorious. What is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful. What is sown is a natural body, but what is raised is a spiritual body."* (ibid. 42-44)

Qualities of the glorified body

Based on the above teaching of St. Paul, theologians distinguish four characteristics or qualities of the bodies of the just after they have been raised from the dead.

1) Impassibility: The glorified body will not be subject to suffering of any kind. No pain, no discomfort, no illness, no harm will come to it in any way. It will no longer be subject to death and corruption, nor to change. In this present life, our bodies experience fatigue after much labour or activity. The risen body will experience no fatigue, nor will it need rest, regardless of activity.

2) Clarity: This quality refers to the fact that the glorified body will have a beauty, a glory, a splendour according to the extent of the growth of grace at the end of this present life. This is because the growth of grace is the measure by which the blessed will share in the divine life and glory of Christ.

St. Paul speaks of this: *"The sun has a splendor of its own, so has the moon; and the stars theirs. Even among the stars one differs from another in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead."* (1 Corinthians 15:41) Our Lord was speaking of this quality of the risen body when He said: *"Then the just will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."* (Matthew 13:43) St. Thomas Aquinas points out that *"this clarity will result from the overflow of the soul's glory into the body . . . The greater the clarity of the soul by reason of merit, so too will the body differ in clarity."* He points out that just as the colour of an object is seen through the crystal container in which it is placed, so the glory of the soul will shine through the body. (Supp. 85,1)

3) Subtlety: St. Paul refers to this quality of the risen body when he says: *"What is sown is a natural body, but what is raised is a spiritual body."* (ibid. 44) Our body in this life is called 'natural' because it is subject to the natural conditions of all animal life, such as generation, growth, nutrition, etc.; but after the resurrection on the last day it will no longer need these biological functions that serve a present and temporary purpose. The risen body will be 'spiritual', that is, entirely subject to the needs and wishes of the glorified soul. This does not mean that the body ceases to be material, but that it is freed from those conditions and functions that serve only a temporary end, and which make it an imperfect instrument of the glorified spirit. To prove that His risen body was material, our Lord said to His apostles: *"See My hands and My feet, that it is I myself; handle and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see Me to have."* (Luke 24:39)

Speaking of the conflict between body and soul in the present life, St. Paul says: *"I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, making me a prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members . . . so that the good I want to do, I do not; and the evil I do not want to do, that I do."* (Romans 7:23) In contrast with this, the risen body will no longer be a hindrance to the soul, but rather its perfect instrument. It will no longer be a source of temptation; the concupiscence of its members and the passions that war against the spirit will no longer exist. Consequently, there will be no more straying thoughts or cravings for forbidden pleasures; no more wanderings of the mind away from the presence of God; no more danger of offending Him.

In this life the body often gets its way against the dictates and wishes of the spirit. The glorified body will be completely submissive to the soul, just as the soul will be completely submissive to God. The order lost by the sin of Adam will have been restored. As Christopher Dawson expressed it: *"Matter will be once more the extension of spirit, not its limit; the instrument of spirit, not the enemy."*

4) Agility: St. Thomas Aquinas states, *"the power of the glorified soul surpasses immeasurably the power of the non-glorified soul"* (Supp. 84,3 ad 3) . . . so that *"whatever instant the will shall choose, at that same instant the body will be in whatever place the will shall determine."* (ibid, ad 1) Consequently, when the blessed move from place to place, regardless of distance, *"the time for the whole movement will be imperceptible."* (ibid. ad 4) St. Thomas explains the reason of this quality of agility in the risen body as follows: *"The soul which will enjoy the divine vision, united to its ultimate end, will in all matters experience the fulfillment of desire. And since it is out of the soul's desire that the body be moved, the consequence will be the body's utter obedience to the soul's slightest wish. Hence the bodies of the blessed when they rise are going to have agility . . . Weakness is what we experience in a body found wanting in the strength to satisfy the desire of the soul in the movements and actions which the soul commands; and this weakness will be entirely taken away, when power is overflowing into the body from a soul united to God."* (Con. Gentiles 4,86)

In this present life, as we are well aware, this body of ours is limited in its capacity to move from place to place. Even astronauts are limited in the speed they can travel, swift as it is. The glorified body, however, will be able to reach the most distant place with the swiftness of thought.

The glory of the risen body

Although, at the end of our present life, this body of ours will return to the earth from which it came, it will by the power of God, be brought back on the last day to be reunited with the soul. Man's nature is a composite of body and soul, and there will be a certain incompleteness in his existence, even in his Heavenly beatitude, until that ultimate reunion takes place.

Yet it will be the state of his soul that will be responsible for the glory and splendour of his risen body; for the beauty and glory of the soul overflows into the body, and shines through the body. For that reason, while we are obligated to take proper care of our body, it is the life of divine grace in the soul that should be our primary concern. Proper care of the body will at times require denying the body what it seeks; for due to an unbalance in our nature because of original sin, the body at times desires in excess what is good, or even seeks (as Adam did) forbidden fruit which can destroy the life of the soul.

How much time and effort and money are spent in seeking to improve the attractiveness of the human body, an attractiveness that lasts only a comparatively short time. At the same time, how little concerned are many about attaining an attractiveness, a beauty and splendour that will cost no money, and that will last for all eternity. Since the glorified body is a reward to the just, the beauty and splendour of their bodies will bear some proportion to their merit.

Every mature human person, then, has the means available of attaining that true and eternal beauty - the leading of a truly Christian life.
