Introduction: Is There a Heaven Beyond What We Can Imagine?

When a Christian thinks of Heaven, he usually imagines a place of light, peace, and perfect happiness, where the saints contemplate God eternally and where suffering, death, and sin no longer exist. However, traditional Catholic theology has explored a much more specific question for centuries: **What exactly is Heaven? Is it merely a spiritual state, or is there also a created reality that constitutes the dwelling place of the blessed?**

Among the most fascinating concepts in traditional Christian theology is that of the **Empyrean**, also known as the Empyrean Heaven: a reality that occupies an important place in the cosmology and theological reflection of numerous medieval authors, especially the Scholastics.

The word may be unfamiliar to many contemporary Catholics. Nevertheless, for centuries it formed part of the usual vocabulary of theology, Christian philosophy, and reflection on the ultimate destiny of creation.

Traditionally, the Empyrean was understood as the highest Heaven, the loftiest region of creation, the dwelling place of the blessed angels and glorified saints. It was not to be confused with the astronomical heavens or the physical space we observe when we look up at the stars. It referred to a heavenly reality of a higher order, associated with glory and beatitude.

However, it is important to establish a distinction from the outset: **the existence of Heaven and the beatific vision belong to the very heart of the Catholic faith, whereas the description of the Empyrean as a particular region or structure of the universe belongs to traditional theological elaboration and is not, in itself, a dogma defined by the Church.**

Understanding this distinction allows us to approach the subject rigorously, without dismissing the richness of ancient theology or turning its cosmological explanations into obligatory truths for all Catholics.

But where did this idea come from? What relationship does it have with Sacred Scripture? What did Saint Thomas Aquinas and other great theologians teach? And how is the Empyrean connected with Purgatory, the beatific vision, and the eternal destiny of souls?

To answer these questions, we must begin with the meaning of this ancient expression itself.

1. What Does Empyrean Mean?

The word *Empyrean* comes from Greek and is related to the term *pyr*, which means fire. Its etymological meaning refers to what is fiery or burning.

In ancient and medieval cosmology, the Empyrean Heaven was understood as a higher heavenly reality, characterised by a light and glory that could not be compared with the ordinary properties of material elements.

We should not imagine it as a place filled with flames or physical fire. The expression was not intended to describe a cosmic blaze, but rather a reality associated with heavenly luminosity, purity, and glory.

Medieval theology used this designation to refer to the highest Heaven, situated above the celestial spheres which, according to the cosmology of that period, constituted the structure of the universe.

Within that cosmological model, several heavens were distinguished:

- The atmospheric heaven, associated with the region of clouds and meteorological phenomena.
- The astronomical heaven, where the stars and celestial bodies were situated.
- The highest Heaven, or Empyrean, understood as the heavenly reality of glory, destined for the blessed.

This classification belongs to historical cosmology and should not be confused with a scientific description of the universe.

Modern astronomy has abandoned the ancient model of concentric celestial spheres. However, this does not eliminate the spiritual and theological content that Christian authors associated with the Empyrean.

Above all, the Empyrean expresses the conviction that creation is ordered towards a fulfilment that radically surpasses earthly reality.

It is not a star, a galaxy, or a region of space that can be located using scientific instruments. It is an expression of the ancient Christian reflection on the heavenly dwelling place and

eternal glory.

2. The Biblical Foundations of Heavenly Reality

Although Sacred Scripture does not develop a systematic doctrine of the Empyrean using the terminology of the Scholastics, it does contain numerous references to heavenly reality, the glory of God, and man's supernatural destiny.

Christianity does not regard Heaven as a mere metaphor for tranquillity or psychological well-being. Heaven is a supernatural reality: definitive communion with God.

Saint Paul and the Third Heaven

One of the biblical passages traditionally associated with reflection on the different heavens appears in the Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Saint Paul writes:

«I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows» (2 Corinthians 12:2).

A few verses later, the Apostle speaks of «Paradise» (2 Corinthians 12:4).

This passage has given rise to numerous theological interpretations. Some authors associated it with the different levels of Heaven described in the ancient and medieval cosmological model.

However, we must be cautious: Saint Paul does not provide a detailed cosmological classification here, nor does he explicitly identify the third heaven with the Empyrean.

What he does reveal is that a heavenly reality exists which surpasses ordinary human experience and to which man cannot gain access through his own natural abilities.

The experience described by the Apostle belongs to the realm of extraordinary revelation, not to a physical exploration of the universe.

The Heavenly Dwelling Place Promised by Christ

Another fundamental passage is found in the Gospel according to Saint John.

During the Last Supper, Jesus comforts His disciples with these words:

«In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?» (John 14:2).

These words contain one of the most beautiful promises in all of Scripture.

Christ does not present eternal life as an abstract idea or as an endless continuation of our earthly existence. He speaks of a dwelling place prepared by Him, of definitive communion with His Father.

The destiny of the Christian is not simply to cease suffering. It is to be with Christ.

Therefore, the hope of Heaven cannot be reduced to a human aspiration for happiness. It is a divine promise founded upon the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

The Book of Revelation presents one of the most impressive images of future glory:

«Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth» (Revelation 21:1).

Saint John then beholds the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven and hears a fundamental proclamation:

«Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man» (Revelation 21:3).

The text continues by describing a reality in which God will wipe away every tear, and where there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:4).

This vision profoundly illuminates the Christian understanding of Heaven.

Eternal beatitude does not consist in escaping from a creation considered evil, but in participating in God's definitive victory over sin and death.

Furthermore, Christian hope culminates in the resurrection of the body and the renewal of creation.

Therefore, the Empyrean, understood within traditional theological thought, must be contemplated within the horizon of this definitive fulfilment, not as a reality detached from

the Resurrection and the new creation.

3. The Empyrean in Medieval Theology

Reflection on the Empyrean acquired particular importance during the Middle Ages, when theologians sought to reconcile ancient philosophy, the cosmological knowledge of their time, and the teachings of Christian Revelation.

Aristotelian cosmology, developed and transmitted over many centuries, offered a hierarchical image of the universe, consisting of different regions and celestial movements.

Christian thinkers incorporated part of this language into their theological explanations, distinguishing between the earthly world, the astronomical heavens, and a higher heavenly reality.

The Empyrean occupied the highest position in that representation.

However, its importance was not merely geographical. Its meaning was connected with the hierarchy of creation and the distinction between nature and grace.

God is the Creator of all things. Angels are spiritual creatures, and human beings are called to participate in divine life through a supernatural gift.

Within that theological elaboration, the Empyrean represented the heavenly realm associated with the glory of the blessed.

Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Empyrean Heaven

One of the fundamental authors for understanding this subject is Saint Thomas Aquinas.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, specifically in Part I, Question 61, Article 4, the Angelic Doctor examines whether angels were created in the Empyrean Heaven.

His reflection begins with a fundamental question: if angels are spiritual creatures, why should we speak of a place in which they were created?

Saint Thomas explains that, although angels do not occupy a place in the same way as material bodies, they can be present in a place through their operation.

Within this context, he considers it appropriate to affirm that angels were created in the

Empyrean Heaven.

Aquinas's explanation forms part of a particular conception of the universe, in which the Empyrean appears as a reality created from the beginning and associated with glory.

It is important to clarify that Saint Thomas is developing a theological explanation within the cosmology of his time. He is not formulating a dogmatic definition that obliges all Catholics to accept a particular physical structure of Heaven.

His contribution remains valuable because it helps us understand how Scholastic theology reflected on the relationship between creation, angels, and supernatural glory.

Why Was It Considered Immovable?

In medieval cosmology, the Empyrean was attributed a particular characteristic: immobility.

The astronomical heavens were understood as regions subject to movement. The Empyrean, by contrast, was understood as a stable reality associated with glory and beatitude.

This immobility also had a symbolic and theological meaning.

While the earthly world is marked by change, corruption, birth, and death, heavenly glory represents the definitive stability of those who have attained their ultimate end.

This does not mean that the blessed remain motionless in the sense of lacking activity. Eternal life is not an empty existence or a passive contemplation without content.

It means that they are no longer subject to the uncertainty of their earthly pilgrimage and can no longer lose the beatitude they have attained.

In Heaven there is a fullness that does not need to be replaced by a higher reality.

4. The Empyrean and the Beatific Vision: Contemplating God Face to Face

Here we find the very heart of this entire subject.

If the Empyrean was conceived as the heavenly dwelling place of the blessed, what is it that truly makes those who reach Heaven blessed?

The answer of Catholic theology is unequivocal: **the beatific vision**.

The beatific vision is the immediate contemplation of God by the souls who have attained heavenly glory.

It does not mean seeing God with bodily eyes, as we contemplate a material object. God is spirit, and His essence cannot be known immediately through the natural faculties of a creature.

For man to contemplate Him, he needs supernatural elevation.

Traditional theology calls this gift the *lumen gloriae*, that is, the light of glory.

It is a grace that perfects the intellect of the creature, making it capable of contemplating God.

Saint Thomas Aquinas develops this teaching in the *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question 12.

The fundamental idea is that no creature can attain the vision of the divine essence through its own powers. It is God who elevates the created intellect, enabling it to receive this supernatural knowledge.

Heaven, therefore, is not simply an extraordinarily beautiful place.

The happiness of Heaven consists in possessing God through the beatific vision, loving Him perfectly, and participating in His glory.

All other joys of heavenly life are subordinate to this reality.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sets out this teaching when it states that those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ.

In paragraphs 1023 and 1024, it explains the reality of the vision of God and eternal beatitude.

The Catechism defines Heaven as the blessed community of all those who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

This statement helps us understand that the essential question is not to determine the coordinates of the Empyrean, but to recognise that man’s ultimate destiny is eternal union

with God.

What Do the Blessed Contemplate?

The blessed contemplate the divine essence, not through an exhaustive comprehension of God—which is impossible for any creature—but through supernatural knowledge that surpasses every natural capacity.

God is infinite, and created intelligence remains finite even when it participates in the beatific vision.

Therefore, the saints do not become gods, nor do they cease to be creatures.

They participate in divine life through grace and attain a happiness that surpasses everything that can be imagined in this life.

Saint Paul expresses this hope in words that have accompanied the Church for centuries:

«For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known» (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The difference between our present condition and our future one is immense.

Now we know God through faith, Revelation, creation, and the signs of His presence.

In glory, the blessed will contemplate Him directly.

For this reason, no earthly experience can be fully compared with the happiness of Heaven.

5. Who Inhabits the Empyrean?

Traditional theology associated the highest Heaven with the presence of angels and glorified saints.

To understand this question, we must distinguish between different realities.

The Blessed Angels

Angels are spiritual, personal creatures endowed with intelligence and will.

They are not deceased human beings, nor are they the spirits of people who have temporarily left their bodies.

They were created by God as beings distinct from human nature.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in paragraphs 328-336, sets out the existence of angels and their condition as spiritual creatures.

Scripture repeatedly shows their relationship with divine glory.

In the Book of Isaiah, we find the vision of the seraphim proclaiming:

«Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory» (Isaiah 6:3).

Revelation also presents heavenly beings worshipping God and proclaiming His holiness.

The blessed angels live in the divine presence and participate in His glory.

The tradition of the Empyrean placed them in this highest Heaven, although we must remember that the presence of angels should not necessarily be imagined as spatial occupation in the same way as that of human bodies.

The Glorified Saints

The saints who have attained heavenly glory participate in eternal beatitude.

Among them is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, through a singular privilege granted by God, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

The dogmatic definition of the Assumption, proclaimed by Pius XII in 1950 through the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, teaches that Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

The Virgin constitutes a privileged anticipation of the fullness to which the Church is called.

In her, we already contemplate the victory of Christ applied in a singular way to a human creature.

The other blessed participate in heavenly glory, but they await the final consummation of history, when the resurrection of the dead and the definitive glorification of the body will take

place.

This leads us to a fundamental question: heavenly happiness is not destined for the soul alone, but for the whole human person.

6. Heaven Is Not a Disembodied Reality: The Resurrection of the Body

One of the great differences between Christian hope and certain philosophical or spiritual conceptions is that Christianity does not regard the human body as a prison from which we must ultimately free ourselves.

God created man as a unity of body and soul.

Sin introduced death, but Christ conquered death through His Resurrection.

For this reason, the Creed proclaims:

«I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting».

This statement is not a secondary addition to the Christian faith. It forms part of its very core.

Saint Paul devotes much of Chapter 15 of his First Letter to the Corinthians to defending the resurrection of the dead.

The Apostle establishes a direct relationship between the Resurrection of Christ and our future resurrection.

If Christ has risen, we too shall rise.

The Catechism develops this teaching in paragraphs 988-1019.

Eternal life does not consist simply in the soul surviving after death. Christian hope reaches its fullness when man rises again and participates fully in glory.

What Does This Mean for the Doctrine of the Empyrean?

It means that we must not imagine definitive Heaven as a purely spiritual existence in which the body has no importance.

The tradition of the Empyrean must be understood within Christian hope for the resurrection and the new heavens and the new earth.

The final destiny of the elect is not an eternity of separation between soul and body, but the fullness of the human person in God.

Heavenly glory does not destroy our nature: it perfects it.

What God created good and redeemed through Jesus Christ will be brought to its fulfilment.

7. The Empyrean and Purgatory: Purification Before Contemplating God

To understand fully the holiness of Heaven, we must pause to consider another fundamental reality of Catholic doctrine: Purgatory.

Heaven is perfect communion with God. Nothing impure can enter into this fullness.

Revelation expresses this reality with a forceful statement:

«Nothing unclean shall enter it» (Revelation 21:27).

This verse helps us understand why Catholic tradition teaches that there is a purification for those souls who die in God’s grace but still need to be purified before attaining the beatific vision.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains in paragraph 1030:

«All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven».

Purgatory is not a second chance of salvation for those who have definitively rejected God.

Nor is it a state in which souls can change their eternal destiny through new decisions.

It is a final purification for those who already belong to God and are destined for glory.

The Two Punishments of Purgatory

Traditional Catholic theology distinguishes two aspects of the punishments of Purgatory:

1. The pain of loss (*poena damni*).

This consists of the temporary deprivation of the beatific vision.

The purifying soul is destined for Heaven and possesses certainty of its salvation, but it cannot yet contemplate God face to face.

This deprivation constitutes an especially profound suffering because the soul, having been purified of the disorders that distanced it from God, longs to attain its definitive union with Him.

This is not despair like that experienced by the damned.

The souls in Purgatory have not lost hope, nor are they separated from God through eternal condemnation. Their suffering takes place precisely within the horizon of certain salvation.

2. The pain of sense (*poena sensus*).

Traditional theology uses this expression to refer to purifying sufferings other than the deprivation of the beatific vision.

Its exact nature has been the subject of different theological explanations.

In particular, some authors have maintained the existence of a purifying fire, while other aspects concerning the precise manner of this suffering remain open to discussion.

It is important not to present a particular description of the fire of Purgatory as dogma.

The Church teaches the reality of purification after death, but has not defined every detail of its nature.

In any case, the distinction between the pain of loss and the pain of sense helps us understand that purification is not simply a passive waiting, but a reality of suffering and transformation ordered towards perfect holiness.

The Desire for God and Suffering Through His Absence

A traditional reflection on Purgatory expresses the idea that the more deeply one desires a good, the greater the suffering caused by its absence.

This consideration is particularly important when speaking about the beatific vision.

The purifying soul does not desire just any kind of happiness. It desires God, who is its ultimate end.

From this perspective, the following theological formulation can be understood:

«In Purgatory there are two kinds of punishments for souls: the pain of loss, caused by the delay of the beatific vision, and the pain of sense, caused by purifying suffering».

This formulation, which develops this distinction, should not be confused with a magisterial definition or attributed to a particular author without a verifiable source.

We should also qualify any description of souls as necessarily experiencing physical pain identical to that of our bodies. Souls separated from the body do not currently possess bodily senses, and the precise nature of their suffering belongs to a reality that surpasses our ordinary experience.

What matters is that purification is real, that it does not constitute condemnation, and that it is ordered towards full communion with God.

The Importance of Praying for the Souls in Purgatory

This doctrine has extraordinarily important practical consequences.

The Church has never considered death a reason to abandon our deceased loved ones.

On the contrary, it keeps alive the tradition of praying for them, offering suffrages, and celebrating Holy Mass for their eternal rest.

The Catechism, in paragraph 1032, recalls the importance of suffrages for the dead and explicitly mentions the celebration of the Eucharist, almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance.

Christian charity does not end with death.

We can and must pray for those who have died, trusting in the mercy of God.

This practice has a profound spiritual dimension: it reminds us that the Church is not made up solely of those who are still journeying on earth, but also of those who have attained glory and those who still need purification.

It is the communion of saints.

8. Is the Empyrean a Physical Place?

This is one of the most interesting questions and also one that requires considerable precision.

If Heaven is a real existence, should we understand it as a physical place situated somewhere in the universe?

The answer requires us to distinguish between traditional theological language and the doctrinal definition of the Church.

For centuries, numerous theologians described the Empyrean as a heavenly place created by God.

This conception was connected with geocentric cosmology and the image of a universe organised into different heavens.

Within that context, speaking of a highest Heaven made sense as part of a particular representation of the cosmos.

However, the development of astronomy has radically transformed our understanding of the universe.

Today we know that the Earth does not occupy the geometrical centre of the universe and that the stars are not organised into the concentric spheres described by medieval cosmology.

Therefore, it would not be correct to attempt to locate the Empyrean through astronomical coordinates or to present it as a region physically situated above the galaxies.

Nor should we fall into the opposite error: thinking that because Heaven cannot be identified with a physical location in the observable universe, eternal life is merely a metaphor.

Supernatural reality does not cease to exist because it cannot be measured using scientific instruments.

Science studies the physical universe through its own methods. Theology reflects on God, creation, grace, and man's supernatural destiny on the basis of Revelation and reason.

These are distinct fields that must not be confused.

The Catechism, in paragraphs 1023-1029, teaches the reality of Heaven and the beatific vision without requiring a particular cosmological theory concerning its location.

Therefore, a Catholic can fully accept the Church's doctrine of Heaven without necessarily having to defend the ancient medieval astronomical structure.

The richness of the Empyrean tradition remains as a testimony to the theological search for a deeper understanding of heavenly glory.

9. The Empyrean and the Hierarchy of Creation: Everything Has Its End in God

One of the most interesting aspects of the ancient conception of the Empyrean is its relationship with the idea of a hierarchically ordered creation.

Christian tradition has always maintained that the universe is not the product of an absolute absurdity or a reality devoid of meaning.

Everything comes from God and is called to find its fullness in Him.

Material beings, living creatures, man, and angels possess different natures and participate in divine goodness according to their own capacities.

Man occupies a singular position because he brings together within himself a bodily and spiritual dimension.

He is called to live in the material world, but his ultimate destiny is not limited to temporal realities.

In Scholastic tradition, the hierarchy of the universe was also understood as a manifestation of divine wisdom.

The Empyrean symbolised the culmination of this ordering.

Nevertheless, we should remember that the hierarchy of creation does not mean that all creatures are steps on a scale of moral value, or that some may be despised in favour of others.

Each creature possesses its own goodness as a work of God.

Furthermore, man is called to respect creation and recognise in it the imprint of its Creator.

Saint Paul writes:

«For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever» (Romans 11:36).

This statement perfectly summarises the orientation of all Christian existence.

Life does not find its ultimate meaning in success, wealth, power, social recognition, or the satisfaction of passing desires.

Everything finds its true meaning when it is ordered towards God.

10. What Does the Empyrean Teach Catholics in the Twenty-First Century?

It might seem that the Empyrean is a concept too ancient to have any relevance to the life of a contemporary Catholic.

We live in an age dominated by technology, space exploration, artificial intelligence, and a worldview profoundly shaped by scientific knowledge.

We speak of habitable planets, distant galaxies, black holes, and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the universe.

In this context, ancient medieval descriptions of Heaven may seem strange or even outdated.

But it would be a mistake to confuse the evolution of cosmological models with the disappearance of the fundamental questions about man’s destiny.

Humanity continues to face the same essential questions:

Why do we exist?

What is the purpose of our lives?

What meaning does suffering have?

What happens after death?

Is there a happiness that cannot be destroyed by time?

Catholic doctrine on Heaven offers an answer that no technology can provide.

Against Materialism: Remembering That We Are Made for Eternity

One of the great temptations of our time is to reduce all existence to what can be measured, produced, or consumed.

Contemporary man can come to live as though his only purpose were to work, accumulate experiences, gain recognition, and prolong his well-being.

But none of these realities can fully satisfy the human desire for happiness.

Saint Augustine expressed this spiritual longing in one of the best-known statements in his work *Confessions*: our heart remains restless until it rests in God.

Reflection on the Empyrean reminds us precisely that human life is open to a fullness that radically surpasses temporal satisfactions.

We have not been created merely to survive.

We have been created to know, love, and serve God, and one day attain eternal communion with Him.

Against the Trivialisation of Heaven: Recovering Christian Hope

At times, even within Christian circles, Heaven is presented as a kind of endless continuation of our present life.

People speak of it as a place where we will meet our loved ones again, where we will be at peace, or where our problems will disappear.

All of this may express legitimate aspects of Christian hope, but it is insufficient.

Heaven is not simply a world without suffering. It is the fullness of God's presence.

The happiness of the saints does not consist primarily in recovering earthly comforts or satisfying desires that belong to our present condition.

It consists in contemplating God and loving Him without obstacles.

This truth must transform the way we live.

If we truly believe in the beatific vision, we cannot regard our relationship with God as a secondary matter.

Prayer, sacramental life, charity, and the struggle against sin cease to be isolated obligations and become the path towards our eternal destiny.

Against the Fear of Death: Living in Hope

Contemporary culture often conceals death.

It avoids speaking about it, removes it from everyday life, and tries to maintain the illusion that youth and health can be prolonged indefinitely.

However, death forms part of our present condition.

The Catholic faith does not invite us to seek death or despise earthly life. It teaches us to understand death in the light of Christ's Resurrection.

Saint Paul proclaims:

«O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?» (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The Christian does not regard death as the absolute end of existence.

He contemplates it with sorrow, because separation from those we love is a real wound, but also with hope, because Christ has conquered death.

The doctrine of Heaven helps us live without turning this temporal life into our definitive horizon.

11. Living with Our Eyes Fixed on Heaven: Consequences for the Spiritual Life

Contemplating the Empyrean should not remain merely a historical or theological curiosity.

Its deepest value lies in reminding us of the ultimate end of our existence.

A Christian who lives oriented towards eternity cannot behave in exactly the same way as someone who considers this life to be all that exists.

The hope of Heaven has concrete consequences.

Holiness Is Not a Secondary Option

If Heaven is perfect communion with God, holiness must occupy a central place in our lives.

It is not enough to identify culturally as Catholic, occasionally attend church, or preserve certain family traditions.

We are called to inner transformation.

Christ expresses this clearly:

«You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect» (Matthew 5:48).

Holiness does not mean having no weaknesses or attaining absolute human perfection.

It means living in God’s grace, fighting against sin, practising the virtues, and allowing Christ to transform our existence.

Every act of charity, every sacrifice offered to God, every sin avoided, and every effort to live according to the Gospel helps us journey towards our true homeland.

Recovering the Importance of Confession

If we understand that nothing impure can enter heavenly glory, we must recover a serious

awareness of our moral responsibility.

Sin is not simply a psychological imperfection or an arbitrary violation of religious rules.

It is an offence against God and a rupture in the order of love.

The Sacrament of Penance offers us forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

For this reason, frequent confession, celebrated with the proper dispositions, is an extraordinary aid to growing in holiness.

We should not wait until the end of our lives to concern ourselves with the state of our souls.

Conversion must be a daily reality.

The Eucharist as a Foretaste of Glory

The Holy Mass occupies a central place in this preparation for eternal life.

In the Eucharist, we truly receive Jesus Christ, present under the sacramental species of bread and wine.

The Catechism, in paragraph 1402, includes the traditional expression of the Eucharist as the pledge of future glory.

Every Eucharistic celebration places us before the mystery of Christ, who died and rose again.

Participating worthily in Holy Mass means uniting ourselves to His sacrifice and receiving the spiritual food that sustains our earthly pilgrimage.

The Eucharist is not simply a remembrance of Jesus or a community gathering.

It is the sacrament of His presence and a foretaste of definitive communion with Him.

Teaching Children to Think About Eternity

Christian formation of children should not be limited to teaching them prayers, rules of behaviour, or biblical stories.

It must also transmit the supernatural meaning of existence.

Parents have a fundamental responsibility in educating their children so that they understand that God is the origin and end of our lives.

Speaking about Heaven, the saints, the resurrection, and eternal life helps form a Christian conscience that does not become trapped within a material horizon.

This does not mean educating children through fear of punishment.

It means teaching them to love God, recognise the value of grace, and understand that the present life is a pilgrimage towards a much greater happiness.

Practising Charity as Preparation for Heaven

We cannot aspire to eternal union with God while despising our neighbour.

Saint John writes:

«If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar» (1 John 4:20).

Charity is inseparable from Christian life.

Heaven is not a reward for those who have simply accumulated religious knowledge or performed external practices.

It is the fullness of a life transformed by grace and love.

Therefore, we must learn to forgive, help those in need, care for the sick, accompany those who suffer, and practise justice.

Heavenly hope does not distance us from our earthly obligations. It encourages us to fulfil them with greater faithfulness.

12. The Empyrean and the Communion of Saints: Heaven Is Not a Solitary Happiness

One final dimension deserves special attention.

Heavenly happiness should not be imagined as an isolated and individual experience.

The blessed live in communion with God and participate in the communion of saints.

The Catechism explains this reality in paragraphs 946-962.

The Church understands three states:

- The Pilgrim Church, made up of those of us who are still living on earth.
- The Suffering Church, consisting of those who have died in God's grace and still need purification.
- The Triumphant Church, made up of those who already contemplate God in heavenly glory.

These are not three different Churches, but three states of the one Church of Christ.

This doctrine has profoundly important spiritual consequences.

The saints are not historical figures whom we remember solely for their virtues.

They are glorified members of the Church and remain united with us in Christ.

For this reason, the Church recommends the intercession of the saints and recognises the value of their example.

It also understands that our prayers for the dead have genuine meaning within this communion.

Heaven does not destroy the bonds of charity: it brings them to perfection.

The Virgin Mary, Queen of Angels and Saints

The Blessed Virgin Mary occupies a unique place in this reflection.

The Church contemplates her as the Mother of God, Mother of the Church, and Queen of Heaven.

Her Assumption constitutes a privileged sign of Christ's victory over sin and death.

Mary is not a creature independent of God, nor is she a divinity. All her greatness comes from

divine grace and her unique union with Jesus Christ.

In her, we contemplate what grace can accomplish in a human creature.

Her glorious presence is also a reason for hope for Christians.

The Mother of God, who remained faithful at the foot of the Cross, now participates in the glory of her Son.

For this reason, authentic Marian devotion must not remain at the level of superficial feelings.

It must lead us to Christ, to conversion, to obedience to God's will, and to hope for eternal life.

13. Can We Imagine What the Empyrean Will Be Like?

This question naturally awakens our curiosity.

What will Heaven be like? What will we contemplate? What will we feel? What will our existence be like after the resurrection?

The answer requires humility.

Revelation offers us images and true statements about future glory, but it does not describe every detail.

Saint Paul writes:

«What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him» (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This text, whose context concerns the wisdom of God revealed by the Spirit, has traditionally also been applied to the greatness of the blessings God prepares for those who love Him.

We cannot reduce heavenly glory to our earthly categories.

When we speak of light, beauty, harmony, peace, and happiness, we use words that help us approach a reality that surpasses our experience.

The saints have used images of banquets, gardens, luminous cities, and heavenly dwelling

places to express this hope.

But none of these images exhausts the mystery.

The Empyrean, in medieval tradition, was precisely an attempt to express the greatness of this reality through the cosmological language of its time.

Today we can preserve its theological and spiritual value without requiring its ancient descriptions to be interpreted as a scientific map.

What matters is that Heaven exists, that Christ has opened its gates for us, and that we are called to participate in His glory.

14. A Necessary Warning: Do Not Turn Curiosity About Heaven into a Spiritual Distraction

There is a danger we must avoid.

We can become so interested in descriptions of Heaven, angels, Purgatory, and supernatural realities that we end up forgetting what truly matters: our own conversion.

Knowing doctrine is necessary. The Catholic faith does not despise the intellect or consider theological questions useless.

However, knowledge must lead to the love of God.

It would make no sense to study the traditional structure of the Empyrean for years while remaining indifferent to sin, prayer, or the needs of our neighbour.

Nor would it make sense to speak about the beatific vision while living as though God did not exist.

Theology must nourish the spiritual life.

The doctrine of Heaven should awaken three fundamental attitudes within us:

First, adoration. God is our ultimate end and deserves to occupy the centre of our existence.

Second, conversion. If we are called to holiness, we must abandon everything that distances us from Him.

Third, hope. No suffering in this life has the final word. Christ has conquered sin and death.

The Christian does not live obsessed with abandoning the world, but committed to living in it according to God's will, while journeying towards the heavenly homeland.

Conclusion: The True Empyrean Begins with the Desire for God

The Empyrean is one of the most interesting concepts in traditional Catholic theology.

Its history allows us to discover how the great Christian thinkers sought to understand creation, the hierarchy of beings, the glory of angels, and man's supernatural destiny.

The medieval cosmology that shaped many of its descriptions no longer corresponds to our current scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, the theological reality it sought to express remains fundamental: **man was created for God, and his definitive happiness consists in contemplating Him eternally.**

Heaven is not a mere metaphor. It is the reality of eternal beatitude, perfect communion with the Most Holy Trinity, and participation in the glory of Christ.

Purgatory reminds us that we need purification. The beatific vision shows us the destiny to which we are called. The resurrection of the body assures us that salvation encompasses our entire person. And the communion of saints teaches us that we never journey alone towards eternity.

Perhaps the most important question is not where the Empyrean is located, how it is organised, or what it looks like.

The truly decisive question is another:

Are we living in such a way that we sincerely desire to reach Heaven?

For we may learn the names of the angels, study the explanations of Saint Thomas, read the Fathers of the Church, and explore the ancient descriptions of heavenly glory. But all that knowledge loses its meaning if it does not lead us to love God more deeply.

The Christian must live with his feet on the earth, but with his heart directed towards Heaven.

He must work, raise a family, fulfil his responsibilities, endure difficulties, practise charity, and fight against sin, knowing that his existence does not end at the boundaries of this world.

Christ has prepared a dwelling place for His own.

That is our hope.

And as we journey towards it, we must remember the words of Saint Paul:

«But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ» (Philippians 3:20).

May this ancient teaching about the Empyrean help us recover something that the modern world risks forgetting: **we were not born for the eternity of passing things, but for the eternity of God.**

And no happiness in this world, however great, will ever compare with the joy of contemplating Him face to face.