

THE
GLORIES
OF
HEAVEN

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The Supernatural Gifts
that Await Body & Soul
in Paradise

ST. ANSELM *of* CANTERBURY

TRANSLATED BY
FR. ROBERT NIXON, OSB

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*O my Friend, flee for a while from your occupations;
Hide yourself from the tumult of your thoughts.*

*Cast aside your burdensome cares and put off
your laborious duties.*

Rest in God, and take your ease in Him.

Enter the inner chamber of your mind;

*Shut out everything except for God, and whatever
helps you to find Him.*

Close the door firmly and seek Him.

Say now, my heart, say to God:

“I seek Thy face; Thy face, O Lord, do I seek.”

—Saint Anselm, Proslogion



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE



SAINT ANSELM OF Canterbury (1033–1109) occupies a distinguished position amongst the great ecclesiastical leaders and spiritual and theological luminaries who have adorned the Benedictine Order. His *Proslogion* (articulating the famous “ontological argument” for God’s existence), *Monologion*, and the treatise *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why God Became Human*) are all indispensable and foundational reading for any serious student of theology. Yet, apart from the learned philosophical and theological works of this illustrious Doctor of the Church, Anselm also produced a very considerable corpus of profound and moving mystical and devotional writings. One such work, which is of particular importance and beauty, is presented in this volume in English translation for the first time: *De Beatitudine Coelestis Patriae* (*On the Beatitude of the Celestial Homeland*, entitled here *The Glories of Heaven: The Supernatural Gifts that Await Body and Soul in Paradise*).

The Glories of Heaven is a transcription of a conference given by Anselm to the monks at the great monastery of Cluny in France. The actual scribe is identified as the monk Eadmer of Canterbury. This Eadmer was a friend and student of Anselm, and he also wrote his most complete and authoritative biography. In the course of this extended conference, Anselm describes systematically various aspects of the happiness of heaven. Although the joys of heaven necessarily transcend and surpass all that can possibly be imagined or expressed, the author postulates that whatever brings us joy during our earthly life will also be present in heaven, but extrapolated there to an infinite degree both in intensity and duration. Thus all the joys experienced in passing and fragmentary form in the here-and-now will be given to us in complete fullness and perfection in the life of eternity.

The spiritual value of the contemplation of the glories of heaven perhaps tends to be overlooked by many contemporary Christians. Yet it is a powerful and potent source of motivation, encouragement, and consolation. Saint Benedict, in his *Rule*, urges us to “yearn for everlasting life with holy desire.”¹ Anselm’s eloquent conference on this subject certainly serves to enliven such holy desires and to awaken such noble yearnings.

In addition, Anselm’s *Mediation on the Day of Judgment and the Blessings of Heaven* and *Exhortation to Strive for the*

¹ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 4:46.

Glories of Heaven are included here. These works, which continue to treat the theme of the glories and joys of heaven, present a spirituality which is radically eschatological. Namely, Anselm urges the reader to live in a manner which is oriented towards future and eternal realities. We witness in these short treatises Anselm's legendary skills as a homilist. His powerful and resonant words can hardly fail to move the soul to a holy desire for the blessings and peace of paradise and the radiant splendors of the New Jerusalem.

As well as these fascinating and inspiring works, a translation of the biography of Saint Anselm from the Tridentine *Breviarium Romanum* is included in this volume.

Anselm of Canterbury, the “*Doctor Magnus*,” was a saint who united the mysticism and austerity of the contemplative and monastic life with the zeal and pastoral diligence of apostolic and episcopal ministry. His writings similarly unite penetrating intelligence and clear, analytical reasoning with overflowing and ardent devotion and passionate imagination. May they continue to guide today's readers in their search for God and inflame in our hearts a desire for the joys and glories of our celestial homeland. And may Saint Anselm intercede for each of us and for the holy Catholic Church. Amen.

Fr. Robert Nixon, OSB
Abbey of the Most Holy Trinity
New Norcia, Western Australia



THE LIFE OF SAINT ANSELM



*from the Breviarium Romanum:
ex decreto SS. Concilii Tridentini restitutum*

SAINT ANSELM WAS born to noble parents, Gundulph [his father] and Ermemberg [his mother], in Aosta¹ in Italy. From his tender years, he was infused with a desire for holiness of life as well as an ardent love of literary studies, and even as a child, he gave many clear signs of his future sanctity and learning.

While he was a youth, however, his attentions were diverted by the vain allurements of this passing world, as is so often the case with young people. But this period of distraction lasted only for a short time, and very soon his heart returned to the narrow path of righteousness. Inspired by

¹ A city in the Italian alpine region.

the desire to attain true sanctity, he left his family's riches and high status and entered the monastery of the Order of Saint Benedict at Bec.² There he made his monastic vows under the Abbot Heluin. Lanfranc,³ the most learned man of his time, served as his teacher and mentor at the monastery. Under his wise direction, Anselm applied himself both to his studies and the cultivation of virtue with such zeal that he made miraculous progress. He soon came to be an exemplar both of learning and holiness to the entire monastic community.

He was so assiduous in his practice of fasting that it seemed as if all sense of taste for food had been rendered extinct in him. He occupied himself diligently in his monastic duties, unceasingly either teaching or responding to various questions and uncertainties on matters of religion and theology. During the night, he took additional time from the hours of sleep to apply himself to silent meditation on divine things. By doing this, he constantly refreshed his soul with the life-giving nourishment of prayer, tears, and holy contemplation.

When he was elected prior of the community, he encountered much envy and resentment from certain brothers. Yet his humility, charity, and prudence were so great

² Located in Normandy in France.

³ Blessed Lanfranc was regarded as the leading Latinist and theologian of his time, and was a prolific writer.

and unwavering that he soon won the respect and affection of these brothers, and thus turned his former enemies and rivals into his loyal friends. He inspired all the brethren to the deepest love of God and most zealous observance of the monastic rule.

After the death of the abbot of his monastery, Anselm was elected as abbot himself—a position which he accepted with a reluctance born of true humility. Very soon, his reputation for sound doctrine and sanctity spread, and his fame shone forth like a radiant light. Not only kings and bishops held him in veneration and esteem, but even the pope, Saint Gregory VII, wrote to him in letters filled with love and admiration. Now at that time, the Church was suffering from very grave persecutions and much internal turmoil, so the Roman pontiff earnestly entreated Anselm to pray both for him and for the entire Catholic Church.⁴

[Now, Lanfranc, Anselm's former teacher at the monastery at Bec, had been chosen as archbishop of Canterbury some time previously and had served in this role with great distinction.] When Lanfranc passed away, Anselm was urged to take up this position, both by William, the king of England,⁵ and all the people and clergy of that land.

⁴ At this time, the Roman Church (and Pope Gregory VII in particular) was in conflict with the Holy Roman emperor, Henry IV, who supported a rival claimant to the papacy, the antipope Clement III.

⁵ This was probably William I, or William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy who had invaded England in 1066.

Anselm was at first unwilling to accept such an elevated ecclesiastical dignity; yet, prompted by so many appeals, he reluctantly agreed.

Immediately, he set to work trying to improve the morals of the general population and also to improve discipline within the Church. This he did both by preaching and by writing, and by convening various councils.

But he came into conflict with King William,⁶ who tried to infringe the freedom and rights of the Church by force. With true priestly constancy, Anselm resisted him firmly. As a consequence, churches and monasteries were stripped of many of their assets, and Anselm himself was forced into exile.

So, banished from England, he traveled to Rome, where he was received with great honor by Pope Urban II. He participated actively in the Council of Barenis, arguing convincingly, on the basis of innumerable references to Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers, that the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son. This was to disprove the error of the Greeks [who believed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone and not from the Son.]

Once King William [II] had passed away, Anselm was recalled to England by the new monarch, King Henry, who was the brother of the deceased William. Shortly after his

⁶ This seems to have been William II, the son of William the Conqueror.

return to England, Anselm passed away peacefully. His fame spread very quickly—both for miracles and outstanding sanctity. This sanctity included particularly his fervent devotion towards the blessed passion of Our Lord and His most glorious Virgin Mother. Moreover, his work in defending the Christian faith and saving souls earned him universal admiration. His own writings provide a heaven-inspired exemplar and norm of the method of scholastic theology, which has been of immeasurable benefit to all theologians.



THE GLORIES OF HEAVEN



by Saint Anselm of Canterbury
and Eadmer of Canterbury

Eadmer's Introductory Letter to Brother William

TO THE MOST reverend Sir, and my brother and friend of outstanding mercy, meekness, and honesty, William: I, Eadmer, the lowest and least of all the monks of the Church of Christ at Canterbury, wish you all the good things that God has promised to those who love Him.

You shall remember, I believe, that when our venerable father, Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury, recently spent a few days at the monastery at Cluny,¹ he took the oppor-

¹ The abbey at Cluny, in east-central France, was a great monastic center at the time. It was especially known for the beauty of its liturgy

tunity to say a few words to the assembly of the brothers there. On that occasion, he said many wonderful things about the eternal happiness of the kingdom of heaven. And you, as you no doubt recall, requested that I should note down all that he said in the presence of the brothers at that time and give you a copy for your perusal and edification.

As you know, I am always eager to fulfill your wishes, and so I at once commenced this work. In the beginning, I had estimated it to be an easy and straightforward task, but it has proved, alas, to be rather more difficult than I expected! But my esteem and affection for you has compelled me to continue with the work I had begun, although, indeed, it may have been better had I not done so. For the material spoken by our father Anselm was beautiful and sublime, and yet I am an unskillful and inept scribe, and scarcely worthy or qualified to commit such things to writing.

It may therefore well be that my incompetence as a scribe will offend the reader more than the noble thoughts contained herein shall please them. What was wonderful and delightful to hear when spoken by Anselm may prove tedious and contemptible when written down by myself. But what I have committed to paper here has been done out of no other reason than sincere devotion and obedience, and motivated by the desire that the wonderful words which

and the cultivation of scholarship amongst its monks.

our venerable father, Anselm, spoke on that occasion may be faithfully recorded for yourself and for other readers.

Stay well, and please pray for me.

Eadmer

Anselm's Prologue

MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING quite a few of irreproachable morals and righteous deeds, who have cast off the vanities of this wicked world often ask: What is the reward which awaits us for living a good life? They may be answered appropriately with the words of Scripture, that their recompense shall be “what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mortal mind conceived—all that God has prepared for those who love him!”²

But for those who are unable to grasp the mysterious significance of this holy utterance, the same answer may be offered in different words: the reward due to those who serve God faithfully in this life is a future life, which lies beyond this world of time and space. This is an eternal life of everlasting joy and of endless bliss. It is a state in which all desires of the soul are fully satisfied and in which no longings go unfulfilled. This future eternal life will be one in which all possible good things shall be enjoyed in the highest degree of perfection.

² 1 Corinthians 2:9.

But such a description is not comprehensible or helpful to some. For they cannot imagine a state in which all the desires of the heart are perfectly satisfied, nor can they imagine the fulfillment of all the soul's desires, or the nature of the "highest possible good." For this reason, the description of the life of heaven which we have just offered may well seem to some to be unappealing and insipid.

What is to be said to such persons who find no delight in such a correct but philosophical description of the joys of paradise? In what way are they to be motivated towards good works?

It is my belief that they are to be handled in the same manner in which one feeds a young child. For if an enormous apple is given to such a child, they will be reluctant to eat it, as their small teeth and tender palate are not capable of handling such a fruit comfortably or with any pleasure. Rather, it is necessary to cut the apple up into small and digestible portions, and perhaps to soften it or sweeten it. Then they shall be able to consume the fruit easily and with true delight.

In the same way, we shall here endeavor to divide the mystery of the beatitude of eternal life into a series of smaller, comprehensible portions. If we consider each of the elements and qualities which the human mind naturally loves during this life, we are able to extrapolate and conjecture from these something of the nature of the future life. For

in this future and unending life (which we shall attain if we hold fast to the commandments of God as we navigate our course through the perils of our earthly existence), all the good things which we currently desire or experience will be given to us in a much more excellent degree, in their very plenitude and perfection.

Such will be the approach we shall take as we embark upon our present discourse. Firstly, we shall consider those properties which pertain to the physical body, and which all human beings naturally desire and love. These include beauty, velocity, strength, freedom, well-being, pleasure, and longevity or immortality. Following this, we shall consider the good things which pertain to the life of the mind or the soul, and which, similarly, are naturally desired by all: wisdom, friendship, concord, power, honor, security, and joy. Finally, the pains and torments of the damned shall be briefly outlined and described.

Of course, there are those amongst the servants of God who, during this present life, deliberately deny themselves some of the good things enumerated above with the greatest conscientiousness. For example, those who are committed to a life of chastity seek neither physical beauty nor pleasure. But they do this not because they have no natural desire or love for such things. Rather, they prefer to renounce these particular good things in this passing world so that they may please God more, and thus attain them

more fully in the life to come. Indeed, the good things of this present life—if one knows for certain that they do not offend God and do not impair one's love for that which is eternal—are always to be preferred to their contraries. This is obvious to our human nature itself.

Having offered these few prefatory remarks, let us now proceed to our consideration of the wonderful and marvelous happiness of the life of heaven, which—by the grace of God—we shall enjoy after the future resurrection of our bodies.

The Beauty of the Bodies of the Blessed

BEAUTY IS A property which is naturally loved and desired by all. In the future life, the beauty of the resurrected bodies of the blessed shall be like the beauty of the sun, or rather shall be seven times more magnificent than that greatest of all celestial lights! For Scripture declares, “The just shall shine like the sun in the presence of God.”³

The glorified body of the Lord Himself shall, of course, be infinitely more radiant than the sun, as no one could possibly doubt. Yet Saint Paul testifies that our own bodies will be like that of Christ when he writes, “He shall transform the body of our lowliness into the likeness of his own

³ Matthew 13:43.

glorious body.”⁴ And Paul speaks with an authority that none would dare to question or contradict.

If there are any who are not satisfied with the evidence of Scripture but wish for a proof based on reason, I believe it may easily be shown that the bodies of the saints in heaven shall exceed the sun in beauty. For it is known that those who attain heaven become a temple and a throne of the Divinity and will be suffused with the glory of God and illuminated by His radiance. And yet the visible sun, as splendid as it is, is a mere created object, and it is therefore certainly less radiant than the divine splendor and less beautiful than the glory of the God Who fashioned it. It consequently follows that the bodies of the saints—suffused with this glory of God—will surpass the beauty and radiance of the sun itself.

The Velocity of the Glorified Bodies of the Saints in Heaven

VELOCITY IS A property which is loved and admired no less than beauty. When we arrive in our heavenly homeland, we shall possess a velocity and rapidity of motion which shall equal that of the angels, who move from heaven to earth and earth to heaven more quickly than one may say it.

⁴ Philippian 3:32.

If anyone should consider it necessary to prove the rapidity and velocity of the angels, there is the well-known story of a certain human being [the prophet Habakkuk] who, when he was still weighed down by an earthly body, was carried by an angel from the land of Judea to the region of the Chaldeans. He carried with him food there [which he gave to Daniel in the lion's den] and was then transported back. And all of this took place instantaneously, as it were.⁵

In heaven, our own rapidity of movement will be fully comparable to that of the angels demonstrated in the above incident. For we are promised that in all respects we shall be made the equals of the angels of God. Indeed, the apostle Paul writes that even if our mortal bodies have been destroyed, dismembered, and dispersed in various locations throughout the earth, they shall, on the day of Final Judgment, be resurrected “in the twinkling of an eye.”⁶ In this expression, he provides eloquent testimony to the velocity with which our future incorruptible bodies shall be imbued. “That which is corruptible”, he says, “shall put on incorruptibility; that which is mortal shall be clothed with immortality.”⁷

We may perceive an example of such celestial velocity in the rays of the sun. Within a mere instant, these rays

⁵ This incident is related in Daniel 14:33–39.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:52.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:53–54.

traverse the entire expanse of the firmament, from the most eastern point to the distant western horizon. From this plainly visible reality, it is easily inferred that the velocity which we have described is by no means impossible. Indeed, the rays of the sun are mere inanimate things, and yet they incontestably possess such marvelous speed. And animate things are, by their very nature, more rapid than inanimate things—so how much greater shall the velocity of the blessed be than that of the rays of the sun!

In fact, each of us already possesses something whose rapidity equals the rays of the sun, even within our earthly condition. For the rays of our eyes can reach the furthest corners of the distant skies and from thence return to themselves, all within the moment of time it takes to open and close our eyelids.⁸ How much more must it be for the souls of the saints, who abide in the purest atmosphere of the heavens! And these souls, although already in paradise, do not yet enjoy the fullness of bliss, which shall happen only after the Final Judgment and the resurrection of the bodies of all the deceased.

When that happens, and the souls of the saints are reunited with their glorified, resurrected bodies, there shall be nothing more which they could possibly desire. Hence

⁸ During the Middle Ages, it was believed that seeing occurred by means of the eyes sending forth rays, which went out, reflected off objects, and then returned to the eyes.

it follows that the soul which has been reunited with its resurrected body must possess mastery of the utmost velocity imaginable, equal to or surpassing that of the rays of the sun or of the eyes, or even of an incorporeal soul or angel.

The Immensity of the Strength of Those in Heaven

AFTER BEAUTY AND velocity, we may consider strength as the next desirable quality, which shall be enjoyed in its perfection in heaven. It is obvious that all beings naturally prefer to be endowed with strength than to suffer from weakness and infirmity. For all those who attain the state of heaven and merit to be numbered amongst the citizens of the celestial Jerusalem, they shall possess such immense strength and power that nothing shall be able to prevent them from performing anything they wish. And there will be no force which is able to remove or overturn them from their state of eternal bliss in the love of God. And they will be able to employ the enormous strength which has been granted to them with no more effort than it currently takes us to blink our eyes!

Let no one be surprised or astonished by this. For in heaven, we shall be truly like the angels. Whatever the angels are able to do, we also shall be able to do. I firmly believe that there is no sane person who would believe that the holy angels do not possess the strength to do whatever

they wish to do. Indeed, since the will of the holy angels and saints accords perfectly with the will of God in all matters, it follows that whatsoever they wish shall always be accomplished in accordance with the indisputable omnipotence of God.

But perhaps someone may object, saying that since in eternal life there is no change or alteration, there will be no action, and hence there will be no need or opportunity to exercise such strength. This is true. But we would offer a simple reply to such people. It is well known that in this mortal life a person may possess strength and abilities without ever actually bringing them into action, and a person may possess knowledge or skill without always making use of such knowledge or skill. In the same way, in heaven, we shall have at our disposal vast reserves of strength and power, even if there is no need to put them into action. For the very possession of the capacity will itself be pleasing and the source of exultation, even in the state of unchanging eternity.

This same observation applies with regard to the matter of velocity, previously discussed, and any other such qualities. If anyone objects that certain qualities (such as strength or velocity) have no possible applicability within the timeless and changeless realm of the celestial paradise, we respond that there is a joy and exultation simply in the possession of such qualities, which is not by any means dependent upon their active use.