

THE INEXPLICABLE GLORY OF HEAVEN

—from the book *The Salvation of Sinners*—

“No eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and no human heart has felt the things that God has prepared for them who love Him” (1Cor. 2:9), states the blessed Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians. The Apostle himself was taken up into the third heaven and heard ineffable words; however, he was unable to adequately describe the heavenly bliss and glory that exists in God’s Kingdom. Certainly, if it were possible for all the tongues of every human being, all the stars in the universe, and all the leaves on trees to come together and speak eloquently in unison as erudite orators, even they would not be able to sufficiently describe the incomprehensible and unfathomable eternal treasures, which the human eye has not seen, the human ear has not heard, and the human mind cannot imagine. Nonetheless, a small glimpse of this divine beauty and joy was revealed to many virtuous and God-fearing people, who recorded them for us, so that our hearts may be set ablaze with love for our Lord and the desire for salvation.

At a certain monastery, there was a virtuous monk who had spent thirty years eagerly carrying out all the commandments of the Lord and obediently serving the brotherhood. Toward the end of his life he had a vision, during which his soul was taken up into Heaven, where he witnessed the divine bliss. After he came to himself, he called the Abbot and all the monks and related the following to them with a pleasant and joyful countenance: “Oh, how sweet and brilliant this past night was! How glorious and delightful were the hymns sung by the choirs of angels and blessed souls as they praised the inexplicable glory and beauty of the Holy Trinity! What a melody! The heavenly spirits sing effortlessly with such harmony in the blessed kingdom above! They worship our Creator ceaselessly; and the more they praise Him, the more their desire to praise Him increases! Amongst these choirs I also noticed some of the brothers from our monastery who had passed away. They have been exalted to an eternal glory and blessedness, and they are filled with and emit such bright light! I marveled and realized that all the people who humble themselves in this world are elevated and glorified in the next life. I actually asked them if it were possible for me to also be ranked amongst them and take part in that blessed assembly, and they told me that whoever lives a blameless life and preserves his baptismal garment pure will

be deemed worthy of this jubilant, heavenly state.” He went on to describe many other wondrous and magnificent things as well, which he saw during his vision, and a few days later he fell asleep in the Lord.



At a certain monastery there lived a virtuous, God-fearing monk, who having heard the verse in the Psalms that states, “**One thousand years before Your eyes, O Lord, is like a day that came to pass**” (Ps. 89:4), oftentimes reflected on these words, but was never able to fathom their exact meaning. Being that there was no learned theologian at the monastery whom he could ask, he began beseeching the Lord to reveal the meaning of this verse to him. After praying at length, the Lord, Who fulfills the requests of them who fear Him, fulfilled his petition in the following manner.

One day at the end of the *Orthros* service, when everyone else had gone back to their cells, this monk remained praying in the church alone, at which time he noticed a breathtaking eagle flying in the chapel. The bird circled around the entire chapel, and every so often it would also glide close to him. Captivated by the rare beauty of this bird, the monk made several attempts to catch it, but was unable to do so. Eventually, the eagle slowly began to distance itself from the chapel, and the monk steadily followed after it, until they came to a nearby forest. After entering the woods, the eagle finally perched itself at a certain spot deep within the forest, where it began singing a sweet, otherworldly melody. As the monk stood in awe, mesmerized by the sweet sound of the song, his mind was elevated to the contemplation of the angelic choirs that exist in Paradise. Overcome by indescribable joy and bliss, in following his body, through the will and power of the Almighty God, became ageless—to the point where he no longer felt the surrounding elements such as heat and cold, he no longer sensed the need for food and water, and no longer perceived any other bodily requirement. He remained in this state of divine transformation, as if he was in the midst of Paradise, listening to the eagle’s angelic hymns for three hundred full years! At some point, the eagle flew away, and the monk came to himself.

Thinking that he had been gone from the monastery for about an hour, he started making his way back.

When he arrived at the monastery entrance, the gate-keeper asked him where he was from and what he wanted. Startled, the monk responded: “I am the church attendant. Don’t you recognize me?” At that point, the gate-keeper suspected that this person may not be in his right mind, and so he told him: “Go on your way my dear fellow. We already have a church attendant here. How could you possibly be the church attendant when I have never seen you here before?” Bewildered, the pious monk started naming all the brothers of the monastic community, one by one. The gate-keeper then took this monk straight to the Abbot, who, in turn, called all the brothers to come together. The monk, not recognizing any of them, thus said in amazement: “I am truly at a loss, my brothers! How did so many things change in the hour I was absent from the monastery? Why don’t I recognize any of you? And how is it that none of you remember me? With the Lord as my witness, I assure you that not even one hour has passed since I left the monastery at the end of the *Orthros* service this morning.” He then proceeded to name the Abbot and the fathers who were present at the service that day. Upon hearing all this, the Abbot decided to look through the monastery’s archives wherein the names of all the monks who had lived at the monastery were recorded, and after carefully searching for the particular names mentioned by the monk, he found that they had resided at the monastery 300 years ago!

Astounded, the Abbot inquired what type of life this monk had led, and what kind of virtue he had accomplished, in an attempt to ascertain why he had been deemed worthy of such a divine experience. To this he replied: “I do not know of anything good that I have ever accomplished. The only thing I did was to be obedient to the Abbot and to love all the fathers sincerely. I also took care to never upset anyone. Additionally, I always preserved a deep reverence and love for the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and I would recite the Salutations to Her every day.” Then he related to them how the eagle had appeared to him and what had happened in following.

Having realized what exactly had taken place, all the brothers began crying with tears of joy and started embracing him, regarding him not as a human but as an angelic being who was speaking truly divine words. Then the Abbot came forward and said: “Give glory to the Almighty God, my child, Who granted you such an extraordinary revelation, through which you acquired an understanding,

albeit in part, of the ineffable bliss and inconceivable hymnology that exists in Heaven. Realize that you remained in this state of vision for three hundred years! The joy and jubilation the saved souls will feel in Paradise from the blessed presence of the All-Holy and Life-Giving Trinity will be so great, that one thousand years will seem like a day to them. This is the meaning of the Prophet David's words, which you yearned to understand."

When the righteous monk heard this, he realized that this was indeed the case, and thanking the Lord with tears of delight, he asked to receive the Immaculate Body and Blood of our Savior Christ. Once he had partaken of the Holy Gifts, he uttered reverently: "Let your servant depart now in peace, O Lord, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation," and straightaway gave up his sanctified soul into the hands of God, Whom he loved and served, and Whom he now worships along with all the saved souls in Heaven.



In a region in France, there lived a pious young lady who, unfortunately, was paralyzed and bed-ridden on account of a severe and incurable illness. Despite her debilitating physical condition, she was exceptionally virtuous, and especially adorned with the gifts of abstinence, patience, and humility. Never once did she complain about her illness; on the contrary, she ceaselessly thanked and glorified the Lord for allowing her to endure this temporary difficulty, knowing that He intended, in turn, to glorify her eternally in His Heavenly Kingdom. She only had one sorrow: that she could not attend church to listen to the services.

One year, during the feast day of the Presentation of the Lord (which is celebrated on February 2nd) when the Christians of this region had the custom of taking icons and making a procession through the streets, this sick young lady was exceedingly sad, knowing that everyone else would be taking part in the procession and the Liturgy while she alone remained home, lying in bed. On account of this, she was thinking to herself: "All the Christians have gone to praise and hymn the Mother of God; I, on the other hand, being unworthy, am rightfully deprived from such spiritual delight." While saying these and many other

similar words with pain of heart, her soul was taken up by an angel into Paradise, where she experienced the following vision.

She found herself before a majestic procession comprised of all the heavenly angels, all the ranks of saints (Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Hierarchs, Righteous, Monastics), and all the blessed souls. All these saintly individuals were proceeding in line, two by two, each one of them shining like the sun and holding a lit candle. As the young girl stood watching in amazement, her guardian angel gave her a candle as well, and, thereafter, she found herself in line with a multitude of other souls, from where she beheld our Savior and King Jesus Christ in the distance. Christ was dressed in brilliant vestments like a bishop, and crowned with an exquisite, regal miter like a patriarch. Standing to the right of Christ was His mother, the Virgin Mary, who had the appearance of a glorious and honorable Queen. The light emanating from these two royal figures was so great that it lit up the entire blessed congregation, which was chanting in unison the hymns appropriate for the Feast of the Presentation.

Soon they came to a spacious and magnificent church. When all the ranks of saints had entered the building, they began to sing a hymn whose harmony and sweetness cannot be described with human words. At the completion of this hymn, the Lord entered into the holy Altar and began the Divine Liturgy by thundering: Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit ...” In the main part of the church, the two choirs of angels were singing the Antiphons. When it came time, Saint Paul the Apostle read the Epistle of the day, and St. Luke the Evangelist proceeded to recite the Gospel passage referring to the Presentation of the Lord.

Finally, at the conclusion of the divine Liturgy, Christ seated Himself upon a throne of glory, and everyone began making their way to Him in an orderly fashion, two by two. After drawing near and prostrating themselves before Him, they would hand Him the candle that they were holding. When her turn came, the pious young lady—sensing that she would once again return to the earth upon the completion of this heavenly ceremony—did not want to hand over her candle to the Lord, but desired to hold on to it on account of reverence and in remembrance of this awe-inspiring vision. Thus, after she made her prostration as all the other souls had done, she attempted to leave hastily. However, the angel stopped her and said, “Give your candle to the Lord, just like everyone else did.” To this she replied, “I don’t want to give it back. I want to keep it, to have as a blessing.” At that point the angel grabbed the candle and tried pulling it away

from her, but the lady clutched on to it very tightly as well. As the two tugged back and forth on each end of the candle, it snapped in half, and each of them ended up with a part of it. And at that very moment the vision came to an end and the lady's soul returned to her body. When she became aware of her surroundings again, she saw that she was actually holding the broken, half candle in her right hand. This filled her with ineffable joy and elation, and in following the Almighty Lord performed amazing miracles with this candle: many blind people received their sight, many who were crippled were able to walk, and various other illnesses were cured.

Having lived a few years more after having this vision with angelic and saintly conduct, this young lady passed into the next life, where she now experiences more profoundly the inexpressible joy, the indescribable beauty, and the unending happiness found within Christ's Kingdom. Through the intercessions of the Mother of God and all the saints, may we all be deemed worthy of this Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.

