

## Secret “Rapture” or Resurrection? (32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—Paul’s Teaching on the Resurrection and the Parousia

<sup>13</sup> But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning *those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope*. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by *the word of the Lord*, that *we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep*. <sup>16</sup> *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first*; <sup>17</sup> then we who are alive, who are left, *shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*; and so we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

1. Dead: “those who are asleep”; problem of bodily resurrection (1 Thess 4:13)
2. Eschatology:
  - a. Those who are “alive” at the end will not “precede” the dead
  - b. The dead in Christ rise *first* at the Parousia (bodily resurrection)
  - e. Christians who are alive will be *transformed* (bodily glorification)
  - d. Living and dead will be “caught up” (Lat *rapiemur*) in the clouds
3. Old Testament Background: Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16-20)

#### Mount Sinai

The Lord *descends* upon Mt Sinai  
In a fiery *cloud* (the “glory cloud”)  
The sound of a *trumpet*  
The 12 Tribes go to *meet* God

#### The Second Coming

Jesus *descends* from heaven  
Caught up in the *clouds*  
The sound of *the trumpet* of God  
The Church gathered to *meet* God

4. Rapture: “caught up” (Latin *rapiemur*, in Vulgate; cf. Protestant Dispensationalism)
5. Parousia: Second “coming” (Greek *parousia*) of Christ (cf. 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 5:23)

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be *the coming* (Greek *parousia*) of the Son of man. (Matthew 24:27)

### The Living Tradition

Thomas Aquinas: [W]hen Paul says, “and the dead,” he mentions *the order that the resurrection will follow*. In doing so, he makes three points. First, he treats *the resurrection of the dead*. Second, he considers *the meeting of the living with Christ*, at “then we who are alive”; finally, he refers to *the happiness of the saints with Christ*, at “and so we shall be always.” Because of these words, some people believed that the last people alive would never die... But only the contrary, “we shall all indeed rise” (1 Cor

15:51). “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22)... And so I say that some shall be alive at the time when Christ shall come for judgment, but in that moment they shall die and immediately afterwards they will rise. (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians* no. 100; trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. What is the exact sequence of eschatological events outlined by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4? How do Paul’s words contradict the common American Protestant idea of a secret “rapture” before the outbreak of the final tribulation?

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### For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Peter Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IX; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2000).
3. Nathan Eubank, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).