

## ***Will there be animals in Heaven?***

Are there animals in Heaven?

St. Thomas Aquinas says no. I say yes. Please keep this in mind for the rest of this column: while the Church has never taught definitively on either side of the question, St. Thomas Aquinas is a Doctor of the Church. He is The Man when it comes to all things theological. I am a doctor of nothing. Let's allow the Doctors to be the people we pay more attention to. If you are interested in reading why St. Thomas Aquinas arrives at his theological opinion, you can find his argument online if you search for "Summa Theologiae III, 91, 5". This was written for graduate students who had completed five years of study in philosophy. If you find his argument simplistic, it may be one's ability to understand the nuance of his argument that is lacking rather than his argument.

So why would I disagree with the theological Heavyweight Champion of the World? It is not because I like animals. I am not a pet-lover. I don't "want" animals to be in Heaven, but I believe that there are certain arguments that indicate that this is likely.

We will have resurrected bodies. It makes sense that those bodies will need a "place" in which to dwell. Keep in mind that "eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, ...[it] has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). It is a given that God wills us to dwell in a place unlike anything we have known or could imagine. But at the same time, it hardly seems to make sense that the God who created this universe and placed us on this particular planet (which He specifically designed for us!) would end up placing us in some Tron-like, dimension-less, immaterial grid.

More to the point, St. Paul also states that, while sons and daughters of God are made for glory, the whole of creation waits to be "set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This seems to indicate that there is some way in which the created world (AKA plants, animals, etc...) is affected in eternity by the Redemption of Jesus Christ. God not only promises a "new Heaven", but also a "new earth" (Revelation 21:1). If the Garden of Eden was paradise, I can't imagine that God would choose to make this new earth a barren wasteland devoid of life.

At least based on these Scripture passages, it would seem that there is something to be said for maintaining that there could be animals in Heaven. So why would a bright guy like Aquinas say no?

There are typically two reasons. The first is that Aquinas knows that human animals are distinct from non-human animals (for more on this, ask me...it'll give me something to write about next month). The second is because he knows that Heaven isn't about me finally feeling fulfilled. Heaven isn't about me finally being

with my deceased relatives. Heaven isn't about me finally getting everything I've ever wanted. And Heaven is not about me finally getting the pony I've always asked for. Those are all good things, and if we "seek first the Kingdom of God" the Lord may see fit to "give us all things besides". But that isn't the point of Heaven. The point of Heaven is about finally getting God.