Ask Fr. James
Are the dead already in heaven or are they waiting till the end of time for the general resurrection?

In the Nicene Creed we profess that we look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. The teaching of the church is that after death comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus himself attests that people would pass directly from death to resurrection in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) and in the promise to the thief on his right hand when they were on the cross whom he told, this very night you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23: 39-43). There are also other indications in scriptures that talks of resurrection after an interim period, that is, upon Christ's second coming, the dead will be raised. Jesus says;

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:28-29).

Pope John XXII in 1331 once preached a sermon concerning the souls of the dead. he said; "Before the coming of Christ, the reward of the saints was in the bosom of Abraham, after the coming of Christ and his passion and ascension into heaven, the reward of the saints is and will be unto judgment day under the altar of God."

Now, concerning whether those who have died have already experienced the resurrection or whether they are waiting in some place till the end of the world when all the dead will rise from their graves at the sound of the trumpet and upon hearing the voice of Jesus Christ; the teaching of the church is that the soul and body partnership is traveling on a three-stage journey of life, death, and resurrection. Although the partnership of the soul and body is temporarily dissolved at death, at the resurrection, the body will not be like the mortal body, but will take the form of a new and glorious spiritual body until death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:35-54) and all these souls, immediately after death and, in the case of those in need of purification, after the purification before they take up their new bodies again and before the general judgment and all will be with Christ in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom and paradise, joined to the company of the holy angels. These souls of the saints in heaven would see God face-to-face.

Our Christian doctrine teaches us that after death there will be a resurrection of the dead and that will be followed by the final judgment in which some people will continue in everlasting life with God and others to hell. The souls of the dead are subject to an immediate particular judgment which decided the salvation or damnation of the individual for all time.

In the Bible, only the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, hinging their opposition of it on who will be the husband of a widow who had two or several husbands when they eventually get to heaven (Luke 20:27-40). Jesus proved that resurrection is possible when he awoke Lazarus who had been dead for four days out of the tomb on hearing Jesus' voice. Then Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in me, even if he should die, he will live; and he who lives and believes in Me will never die forever! Do you believe this? "(John 11: 1-25).

In Acts 4:1–3 it is reported that Peter and John were arrested because the Sadducees and other religious leaders were "much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. Later in Acts, when Paul addressed a gentile crowd in Athens, the listeners were divided in their opinions when they heard about the resurrection. (Acts17:32) Jesus' resurrection is at the core of the Christian faith. Our own resurrection is the gateway to our participation in the Kingdom of God which began in this present age and continues after our dying and going to heaven.

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.