

Heaven

By Mike Latona/Staff writer

The common depiction of heaven, Jeff Hurley said, is of a place "where the sun is always out. Everybody's wearing white, and everybody's happy."

Hell, on the other hand, is where you're "doing hard, physical labor. And everyone's miserable," said Jeff, 16, a parishioner at Church of the Nativity in Brockport.

Are there indeed sunny days and white clothing in heaven? And is hell crammed full of flames and suffering? Do good people always go to heaven, and bad people to hell?

The afterlife is not that simple and clear-cut, diocesan teens said.

"Only God knows where we're going to go," said Cara Rosati, 19, from St. Paul of the Cross Church in Honeoye Falls.

Jill Hurley — Jeff's twin sister — said it's hard to know exactly what heaven and hell look like, because no human on earth has ever been there.

"I'm not sure if anybody can really give a good description," Jill remarked.

Jill said, for instance, that heaven may not actually be located up in the sky above the clouds. She added that Bible passages that tell of hell as a fiery place "might just be a way of describing evil."

Although the visual aspects of heaven

and hell might be

debatable, Jeff and Cara said they're pretty sure of what the spiritual atmosphere would be like.

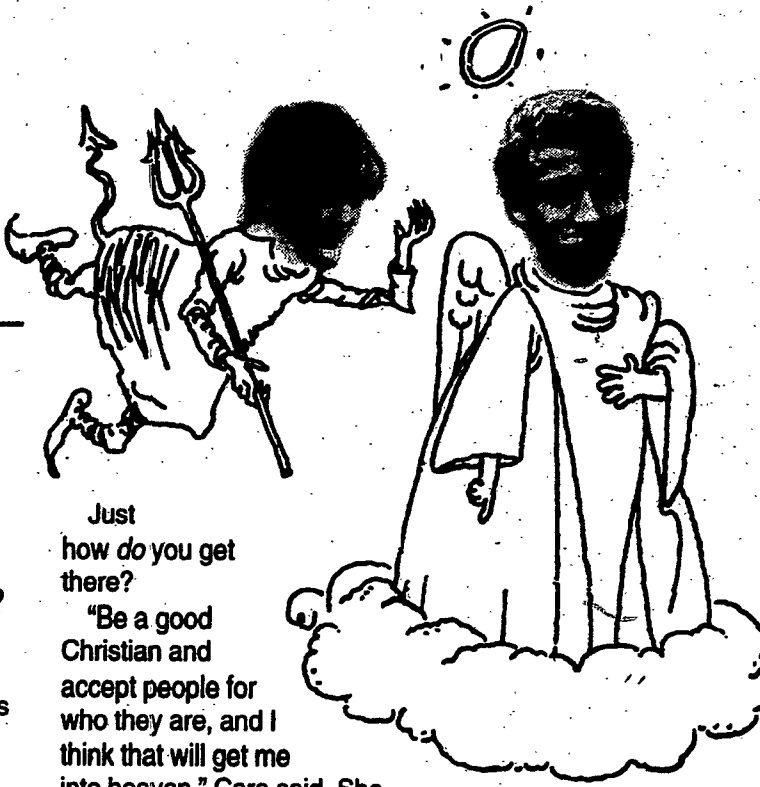
"I guess (heaven) would be to take the happiest times in my life and replay them," Cara said. "I'd be with my (deceased) grandparents and we'd all be one big happy family."

"Heaven would be where you do all the things you've liked to do, and everybody that you love is there," Jeff said.

Amanda Capuano added that heaven is also a place where souls can put their troubles aside forever.

"If you've had a rough life, this is the final peace. You finally don't have any worries," said Amanda, 15, from Guardian Angels Church in Henrietta.

Amanda added that souls in heaven share equally in this peace. "There are so many different (social) classes in our society, but once you get into heaven you realize everyone's equal," she said.



Just how do you get there?

"Be a good Christian and accept people for who they are, and I think that will get me into heaven," Cara said. She added that she has lived by a slogan for several years: "Do your best, and God will do the rest."

"Once in a while I do things that *wouldn't* get me in, but I try hard," Cara commented.

Jill agreed that although all humans are prone to sin, God will not necessarily hold our sins against us when we die.

"God would forgive little things you do that are wrong. And if you love people and really, really pray, I'm sure you'll get into heaven," Jill said.

Then again, Jeff said that committing violent crimes and not being remorseful for them is a good ticket to hell.

"You've got to screw up pretty bad, and not feel sorry for what you did," Jeff said.

Meanwhile, Cara added that people run the risk of going to hell by "being prejudiced, hating everyone, not loving people for who they are, committing hate crimes."

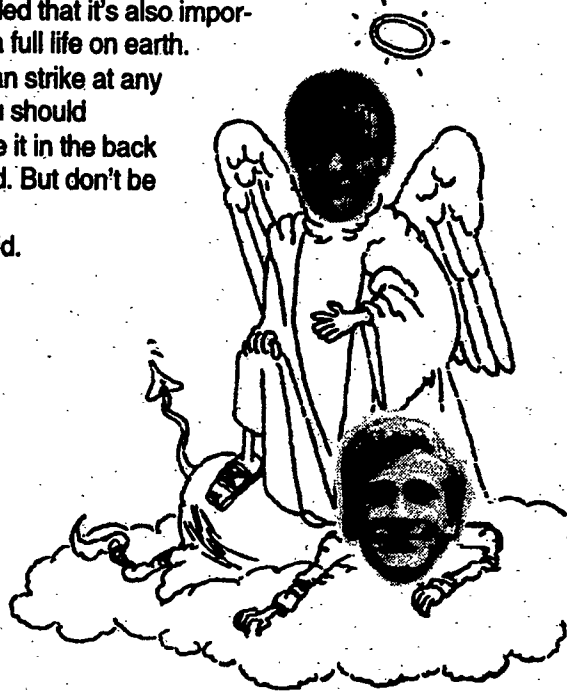
Cara said she believes that forces from heaven and hell are present in our daily lives. For instance, she said that angels in heaven lend spiritual assistance to those who are still on earth, and that the temptation to commit evil acts is "the devil calling us. So we're connected to both."

Even though we don't enter heaven and hell until we die, these are important matters to consider each day, Cara asserted.

"Most people live life as if there's going to be a tomorrow. But there's not always tomorrow," Cara said.

Amanda agreed with Cara, but recommended that it's also important to live a full life on earth.

"Death can strike at any time, so you should always have it in the back of your mind. But don't be obsessed," Amanda said.



A fork in the road

How do you get to heaven or hell? The Catechism of the Catholic Church offers a spiritual road map, so to speak. Here are some teachings taken from Part One, Section Two, Article 12 of the catechism.

Nos. 1033-1037 describe hell as eternal punishment for those who die in mortal sin without repenting and refusing God's mercy. In this state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed, hell is the just penalty for those who have refused to accept God's mercy. It is a state of eternal separation from God in whom alone man can possess the beatitude for which he was created and for which he longs.

The catechism notes that Matthew 25:31-46 describes hell as a fiery place. There, Jesus said that the accursed will be ordered into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

These accursed people, the catechism states, make their own free choice to spend the afterlife in hell. God predestines no one to go to hell for this a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end.

Heaven is described quite differently in Nos. 1023-1029 of the catechism. Heaven is defined as a "perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity" — a communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed — the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

The catechism says that a complete depiction of heaven is unavailable to mortal man. This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise.

The privilege of heaven, the catechism adds, is extended to "those who have believed in (Christ) and remained faithful to his will."

Before reaching heaven, the souls of those who have died in an imperfect state must spend a period in purgatory. As described in Nos. 1030-1032 of the catechism, purgatory is a place for "all who die in God's grace and friendship, but are still imperfectly purified." In purgatory, souls will undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

& Hell

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