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Heavenly Pets

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Heavenly Pets

Pet cemeteries are not places for pets that believe they will “go to heaven,” since it is people who make the memorial arrangements, not their pets. But the various ways that people choose to memorialize pets, from photos to cemetery monuments, testifies to the bonds of affection that humans can develop for non-human creatures. Children sometimes ask whether pets go to heaven, and some adults affirm that pets accompany humans after death. Consideration of an after-life for animals necessarily assumes that human life does not end with death.

Whether one does or does not believe that pets will be waiting in heaven for their owners, all of us can take the question about animals as an occasion to reflect on our present understanding, belief, and hope about transcending death. While most of us find it amusing that a famous person might choose to have a favorite car or other possession buried with him or her, we understand those people who say that they love this or that material thing or activity and of course those who talk about their love for people, and also for pets.

Some of us might think that our life now is only worthwhile because of our relationships with persons and things that we love, and conclude that they will have to be with us in heaven if we are to be happy there. Others might believe that their personal connection with God, which is important now, will be totally satisfying in life after this life, so that nothing more will be needed. Or we might consider that anything is possible: that, after death, we could be with God, certainly, but also accompanied by persons, pets, and the glories of creation that we can appreciate now, plus those that the infinitely creative Creator might provide for us in an active, eternal progression of love.

Our minds are liable to metaphorically rattle within our heads if we try to envision what it might be like for us in heaven. And so, rather than relying on our limited powers of imagination, we can reflect on present experience, and seek to distinguish the interior movements of our hearts and minds that underlie our relationships, our decisions, and our attitudes.

If we become clear about the most important aspects of our lives now - those which define who we are, and who we are becoming - we will be able to identify what must continue in some way after our death, especially if our reflections are guided not only by our present beliefs, but also by our deepest values, especially honesty. For example, most of us would not say that our list of accomplishments will be the part of us that will live forever. Nor would we say that the most important component of ours that

transcends death will be our physical appearance as it has been at some particular stage of life. Rather, even if we cannot find the exact words to describe the essential characteristics that make life worth living this very day we can reasonably trust that those qualities will continue even after this life comes to an end.

We do not have to all come to the same answers, nor do ours have to remain the same always, because mere words are never adequate to identify our God-given desire for "more." We can never be completely satisfied in this life, but our deepest desires reveal to us that which must accompany us through death, into God, who is love.