

Whenever the Pope visits the United States, it is an extraordinary event, especially for those of us who are Roman Catholic. There will be intensive media coverage of the Pope's visit. What the Pope has to say, or what he didn't say, will be analyzed and interpreted and evaluated for us in the papers and on the news. A papal visit is a big thing.

Imagine what planning it takes to make something like this happen. The Pope's every move is carefully planned. A papal visit is something for which careful, strategic preparations are made. The United States Catholics want the Pope to feel welcome and comfortable while he's here. Even the President will greet the Pope. When the Pope comes to visit, great preparations have been made.

The same thing happens when any foreign dignitary visits. But even we ordinary people, when we have someone coming to visit us, don't we make preparations? We clean up the house. We prepare a guest room. We plan a dinner menu. We plan things to do while our guests are with us. And so on. We make preparations. It's what you do when you have someone coming over.

What an amazing thing it is then, to consider that God is preparing for our arrival! Jesus tells us that He goes to prepare a place for us and that He will come and take us there, and we will be where He is. Not only has Jesus come to give us abundant life, but He goes far beyond that. Jesus goes to prepare a place for us in His Father's House.

We don't often hear much about Heaven. Somehow we assume that we cannot talk about it. Generally, people regard the topic of the life of the world to come as too mysterious and wonderful for words, which means there's no point in trying to talk about it anyway, or that talking about it is somehow forbidden. Some people think we must not spend our time considering what Heaven might be like because we have to do our duties here on earth and leave such matters to the Almighty.

Nonsense. Jesus tells us something about Heaven right here in John's Gospel. He doesn't spell out all the details, but He wants us to know that it's real. He tells us about it because He wants to set our minds and our hearts at ease. We can rest assured that there is a place for us in the life of the world to come. We can count on it. Believe in God and in Jesus Christ.

Consider that it is Jesus who is preparing a place for us in His Father's House. When Jesus speaks of His Father's House, He means simply that place where the Father dwells. We get different images of that from the various ways this passage is translated from the Greek. The one we heard uses the word "dwelling places". Other translations use the word "mansions". And that word conjures up images in our minds of a grand, glorious house.

But even so, my idea of a mansion is very likely not the same as yours. And that is why Jesus assures us that the place He goes to prepare will be for us. It will be a perfect fit. Again, Jesus came to give us

abundant life, a life that begins here in this world but extends into the next. The place Jesus is preparing for us in the next world will be one that truly is for us. When you get there, you will certainly say, “this is for me.” It could not be otherwise.

Maybe we sometimes shy away from talking about Heaven or even thinking about it because even though we understand it to be a glorious place, there’s still something about it that seems daunting, or unnerving or even frightening. I can remember as a child trying to grasp the thought of eternity. I was trying to understand infinity in terms of living. I thought about living into the infinite future. And regardless of the fact that I might live into the infinite future in Heaven, the idea of a life with no end point seemed frightening.

Or was the thing I was afraid of really the prospect of actually being in the immediate presence of God Himself? How will I act? What do I say? Do I just bow before Him all the time and never say anything unless He speaks to me first? Just how does one conduct oneself in the presence of the Almighty?

Because that’s what Heaven actually is after all: living in the immediate presence of God. Heaven is living in the company of God. In the place that Jesus has gone to prepare for us, we will see Him and speak with Him and live with Him just like we live with each other now.

We can’t see what that will be like because our contact with Christ now is limited and hazy and sporadic. St. Paul describes it as seeing

through a glass darkly. We get a kind of glimpse at times, but it is fleeting. When He comes to take us to where He is, it will be face to face.

Jesus tells us about His Father's House and that He goes there to prepare a place that will be precisely for us because He wants our hearts to be at peace.

I once heard a preacher speak about the place Jesus goes to prepare for us this way. He said that when you consider the grandeur of this world, the beauty and the intricacies of nature, the workings of the human body, the colors of sunset, the mountains, the oceans, the leaves changing in fall and the flowers blooming in spring, the vastness of space and the miracle of a newborn baby and you realize that God made it all in six days, but He's been preparing a place for us for that last two-thousand years, you get an idea of the glory of Heaven.

We've seen what God can do and has done. And as Christians we can see the goodness of God. Jesus Christ is the proof that God is willing to give us everything He has to give. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans, "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with Him?"

And we have this promise from our Lord Jesus Christ that He will bring us to Heaven, and that our own place in it will be just right for us and nothing good will be left out or missing.

Since Jesus is preparing a place for us, it might not be a bad idea that we should also prepare ourselves for it as best we can. We can't

completely prepare ourselves for that place. But Jesus will do the rest. Let not your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God. Have faith also in Jesus. Amen.