

January 2010: SD Website

BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

Fellow Pilgrims:

Our worship service uses the word soul, but do we really know what it means? The Bible uses soul and spirit, but do we know the differences, if any? Are our soul and spirit immortal? Paul closes his first letter to the Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 5:23) by saying, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In my January essay on the spiritual director’s page of St. Mark’s website, I will explore some possible answers to questions of what constitutes our soul, spirit, and body. Next month, I will explore the meaning of the word *peace*, which we find throughout Scripture and in our worship.

The best explanation of these three words I have ever found came from Peter J. Kreeft’s *Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing*. I am lumping our mind and body together since the mind depends on the brain, which is a part of the body. Kreeft talks about a map of joy in order to explain these three terms. He says we need to think of our self as a canyon with two sides that only meet at the bottom.

The northern side is the heat of the fire of life. This is the side of our feelings and emotions. When we talk about our instincts, we usually mean our feelings schooled by our experiences. The southern side is the light of the fire of life. This is the side of our thoughts and knowing. We start at the top of the canyon and proceed to go deeper. The top of the canyon sides is the domain of the body. For our feelings, this is the side of pleasure. For our thoughts, this is the side of sensation. About halfway down the two sides we move into the domain of the soul. For our feelings, this is happiness. For our thoughts, this is knowledge. When we reach the bottom of the canyon where our feelings and thoughts meet, we are in the domain of our spirit. For our feelings, this is joy. For our thoughts, this is wisdom.

Kreeft believes that the body and soul are part of our natural life. We are born with a body and soul. Our body is an ensouled body, that is, the soul is the life of the body. We are living bodies, alive not just because we have biological life within us, but also because the soul lives within our body. Our spirit is the heart of our spiritual life. Our spirit comes from God (Genesis 2:7; Matthew 5:3; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 1:7). The spirit makes the difference between life and death of the body. Our spirit, the deepest or most fundamental part of us, gains its life through God the Father, who is the source of life. Our spirit’s consciousness is a participation in the Word of God, by allowing God’s Word to penetrate us at our deepest level. Our spirit’s joy is only possible because of the inner joy of love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The body is our relation to what is less than ourselves, that is, the nonhuman material world. The soul is our relation to ourselves, that is, self-consciousness. It can also be our

relation to other people. I believe this is where we get the idea of a soul mate. The spirit is our relation to what is more than ourselves, that is, God. God is the only immortal one (I Timothy 6: 15-16). Our bodies, souls, and spirits are not immortal. They die and are then resurrected through Christ. We only gain eternal life through our free choice to be born again (John 3: 3) in Christ. Without the divine miracle of raising the dead, there is no hope for immortality or eternal life (I Corinthians 15: 17-19). When we are raised, we are raised as body, soul, and spirit. Our spirit is confronted by God and only has two choices: for or against. The spirit is where we decide whose and who we are. God wants to be our spirit's husband (Isaiah 54: 5).

In worship, prayer, and other aspects of our spiritual life, we need to participate with our body, soul, and spirit. I want to end with Anselm's call to meditation. "Come now, little man, turn aside for a while from your daily employment, escape for a moment from the tumult of your thoughts. Put aside your weighty cares, let your burdensome distractions wait, free yourself awhile for God, and rest awhile in him. Enter the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything except God and that which can help you in seeking him, and when you have shut the door, seek him. Now, my whole heart, say to God, 'I seek your face, Lord, it is your face I seek'." O Lord, help us to seek you with our whole body, soul, and spirit. Amen

In Christ's love,
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