

THE LAST THINGS

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When we speak of the Last Things, we are specifically talking about Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. This workshop is meant to be a brief overview of what the Church teaches on these, as well as what she teaches about Purgatory.

Please see paragraph #'s 988 – 1060 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church for more information on these teachings.

I. Death

- A. The separation of body and soul
- B. The end of earthly life
- C. Result of original sin – Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12, Romans 6:23 – “the wages of sin is death.”
- D. God had not destined us to die.
- E. We would have been immune from suffering and death if man had not sinned.
- F. Death is transformed by Christ Jesus – “**so as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**” – Romans 5:21
- G. Through Baptism, the Christian has already died with Christ sacramentally in order to have a new life in the order of grace. – Romans 6: 3-4
- H. If we die in Christ’s grace, our incorporation into His redeeming act is completed. – 1 Corinthians 15:21

“Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.” - Roman Missal, Preface of Christian Death I.

- I. We die once. There is no reincarnation. Our ultimate destiny is fixed at the moment of death. – “...**it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment...**” - Heb. 9:27

II. Judgment

- A. The Particular Judgment
 1. Death puts an end to human life as the time to either accept or reject divine grace.
 2. At the moment of death, we receive a particular judgment, cf. Heb. 9:27 - Either:
 - a. The blessedness of heaven – immediately or after purification or,
 - b. Eternal damnation
 3. Scripture frequently affirms an immediate judgment
 - a. Lazarus and the rich man – Lk. 16: 22
 - b. The words of Christ on the cross to the good thief – Lk. 23: 43

III. Heaven

- A. Heaven is perfect life with the Blessed Trinity.
- B. A communion of life and love with the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the angels, and all the blessed.

- C. Supreme, unending happiness
- D. Heaven fulfills all of the deepest human longings.
- E. Those who die in God's grace, i.e. in a state of sanctifying grace, will be with God forever in heaven – either immediately or after purification (purgatory)
- F. One must be perfectly purified to enter into the beatific vision (vision of God, contemplation of God in His heavenly glory). – "...**but nothing unclean will enter it...**" Revelation 21:27
- G. Heaven had been closed to us by sin. By His death and resurrection, Christ has opened heaven to us.
- H. Scripture uses images to describe heaven, e.g. life, light, peace, wine of the Kingdom, the Father's House, the heavenly Jerusalem, Paradise, the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, – "Then the angel said to me, **"Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb."** – Revelation 19:9
- I. **"No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him."** – 1 Cor. 2: 9
- J. God wants all of us to make it, but will force it on no one. **"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."** – Jn. 14:2-3

IV. **Purgatory**

- A. Purification undergone by those who die in God's grace and friendship, but are still imperfectly purified at the time of death.
- B. Purgatory shows forth God's justice and mercy
- C. This purification is entirely different from the punishment reserved for those in hell.
- D. Teaching based in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition
 - 1. Mt. 12:31 – "...**but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.**"
 - 2. 2 Macc. 12: 46 – **"Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin."**
 - 3. 1Cor. 3: 15; 1 Pet. 1: 7 – A cleansing fire
 - 4. From beginning of the Church, prayers, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice have been offered for the dead. This only makes sense if there is Purgatory. Why? Because those in heaven don't need prayers and for those in hell, prayer will do no good.
- E. Teaching based in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.
 - 1. The tradition of the Church, based on Sacred Scripture, sometimes speaks of Purgatory as **"a cleansing fire."** – 1 Cor. 3:15, 1 Peter 1:7
- F. We can help those in Purgatory by our prayers and they can help us by theirs, but those who are in Purgatory cannot help themselves.
- G. Catechetical point – All who are in Purgatory will definitely make it to heaven. Our prayers can help them get there sooner.
- H. "Front Porch" analogy, "Vestibule" analogy, "ship returning" analogy

V. **Hell**

- A. Hell is the definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed.

- B. Reserved for those who die in un-repentant mortal sin.
- C. Jesus speaks often of “Gehenna,” of “unquenchable fire.” – Mt. 5: 22, 29; 10: 28; 13: 41-43, 50; Mk. 9:43-48, Rv. 21:8
- D. Hell is reserved for those who die in un-repentant mortal sin
- E. Church teaching affirms the existence of hell.
- F. Chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God – **“These will pay the penalty of eternal ruin, separated from the glory of his power, when he comes to be glorified among his holy ones and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, for our testimony to you was believed.”** - 2 Thes. 1:9
- G. God does not predestine anyone to hell. God desires that all people be saved. – 2 Pet. 3: 9
- H. However, God does not override our free will. We must freely choose His divine love.
- I. In the Eucharistic Liturgy we pray that God will save us.
“Father, accept this offering from your whole family. Grant us peace in this life, save us from final damnation, and count us among those you have chosen.” - Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I

VI. The Last Judgment

- A. Resurrection of the dead of both the just and the unjust will precede the Last Judgment.
- B. Then Christ will come in glory, and all the angels with Him, to judge the living and the dead.
- C. Will show forth God’s justice over all injustices that creatures have committed
- D. All the nations will be gathered before Him
- E. Last Judgment will show forth the truth of each person’s life and relationship with God. Nothing will be hidden. – **“For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”** – Eccl. 12: 13-14
- F. God knows the hour of His coming, we do not. Jesus was very clear on this.
- G. This doctrine calls us to conversion. **“Now is the acceptable time...”** – 2 Cor. 6: 2

VII. The New Heaven and the New Earth

- A. No more pain, suffering, tears
- B. Everlasting happiness, peace, communion
- C. Visible universe will be transformed – CCC 638
- D. God will be **“all in all.”** – 1 Cor. 5: 28
- E. Every human being will receive a resurrected body after Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. Our resurrected bodies will correspond to the state of our respective souls. The resurrected bodies of those who go to heaven will be “glorified bodies” with special properties. There are seven qualities of the glorified body as taught by St. Thomas Aquinas. (It has been my experience that students, from little children to adults, love learning about these characteristics). “He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself.” – Philipians 3:21. Read 1 Corinthians 15: 35-58.

1. Identity – Person will still have their original identity (This does not mean the glorified body will look just as it did during this life.)
2. Integrity – Our bodies will be complete.
3. Quality – Bodies will have their original gender and be as if be youthful in appearance.
4. Agility – Because our bodies will be under the complete direction of our souls, they will possess complete freedom of movement and with great speed.
5. Subtlety – Matter will not be an obstacle to our glorified bodies.
6. Impassibility – No pain or suffering in the glorified body.
7. Clarity – The glorified body will be magnificent, brilliant, and beautiful beyond belief.

VIII. The theological virtue of Hope

1. Hope – the theological virtue by which we desire and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to attain it (1817).
2. Sins against the Virtue of Hope
 - a. Presumption – An act or attitude opposed to the virtue of hope. Presumption can take the form of trust in self without recognizing that salvation comes from God, or of over-confidence in divine mercy. One presumes upon his own capacities thinking He can save himself without God’s help, or he presumes upon God’s almighty power and mercy thinking he can gain forgiveness without conversion or glory without merit (2092).
 - b. Despair – The abandonment of hope in salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

IX. Great Helps to Holiness and Heaven

- A. Holy Mass every Sunday & Holy Day of Obligation and frequent reception of the Most Holy Eucharist (must be in a state of sanctifying grace when receiving the Eucharist).
- B. Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance
- C. Obedience to the Church
- D. Daily prayer
- E. Formation in the truth
- F. The practice of the virtues
- G. Keeping of the Commandments
- H. Penance and almsgiving
- I. Commitment to the poor and vulnerable
- J. True devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, the holy angels, and the saints
- K. The value of sacramentals

In our catechesis and in our catechetical preparation, we should frequently read Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Here are a few more recommended resources:

Theology for Beginners by Frank Sheed; Servant Books, Ann Arbor, MI, ISBN: 0892831243

The Last Things by Regis Martin; Ignatius Press; ISBN: 0898706629

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven But Never Dreamed of Asking by Peter Kreeft; Ignatius Press; ISBN: 0898702976

Love is Stronger Than Death by Peter Kreeft; Ignatius Press; ISBN: 0898703921

Snakebite Letters by Peter Kreeft; Ignatius Press; ISBN: 0898707218

The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis; Harper San Francisco ISBN: 0060652934

The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis; Harper San Francisco; ISBN: 0060652950

Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Heaven: But Never Dreamed of Asking by Peter Kreeft; Ignatius Press; ISBN: 0898702976

For excellent explanations of Catholic teaching, I also highly recommend the Catholic Answers website. It is: <http://www.catholic.com>