

The Last Things

Overview: God "...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) For each man there will come death and his judgment. For those who persevere in grace and are completely sanctified, they will enter into heaven. For those who persist in denying God's love and mercy until their last moment in life, there will be everlasting punishment. "We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives for ever, so after death the righteous will live for ever in the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day." (CCC 989)

Catechism Readings:

- 988-1014: Death and Resurrection
- 1020-1029: Particular Judgment and Heaven
- 1030-1032: Purgatory
- 1033-1037: Hell
- 1431-1434: Penance
- 1680-1690: Funerals

Outline:

- **992-1004** Christ's Resurrection and Ours
 - "Let us consider, beloved, how the Master is continually proving to us that there will be a future resurrection, of which he has made the Lord Jesus Christ the firstling, by raising him from the dead. Let us look, beloved, at the resurrection which is taking place seasonally. Day and night make known the resurrection to us. The night sleeps, the day arises. Consider the plants that grow. How and in what manner does the sowing take place? The sower went forth and cast each of the seeds onto the ground; and they fall to the ground, parched and bare, where they decay. Then from their decay the greatness of the master's providence raises them up, and from the one grain more grow and bring forth fruit." (Pope Clement I, *Letter to the Corinthians* 24:1-6)
 - Resurrection of the dead is a consequence of God as creator of the whole man, soul and body.
 - Faith in the resurrection rests on faith in God who "is not God of the dead, but of the living." (Mark 12:27)
 - Jesus is "the Resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)
 - We shall rise like Christ, with him, and through him.
 - Death (see 1005-1014 below) is the separation of the soul from the body, but God will grant life again to our bodies by reuniting them to our souls.
 - All the dead will be resurrected, "those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:29)
 - How this will be is beyond our understanding.
 - When this will happen will be at the end of time.
 - In Baptism we begin this life in Christ and it is a foretaste of our life in heaven, especially through reception of the risen Christ in Holy Communion.
- **1005-1014** Dying in Christ Jesus
 - Death is the end of earthly life, when our soul is separated from the body.
 - Because of our mortality, we only have a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment.
 - "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before...the years draw nigh, when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'...and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 7)
 - Death is a consequence of sin

- “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and o death spread to all men.” (Romans 5:12)
 - “For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)
 - “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living.” (Wisdom 1:13)
 - Death is a reminder of our rebellion against God
 - Death is transformed by Jesus through him becoming man and suffering death himself.
 - As a Christian, death then has a positive meaning.
 - “For me to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21)
 - “The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him.” (2 Timothy 2:11)
 - A Christian has already died with Christ in the sacrament of Baptism and incorporated into his Body.
 - “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)
 - There is no such thing as reincarnation.
 - It is the most important moment of our lives and the Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for it.
 - We should pray throughout our lives for a happy death
 - “From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord.” (*Roman Missal*, Litany of the Saints.)
 - “Every action of yours, every thought, should be those of one who expects to die before the day is out. Death would have no great terrors for you if you had a quiet conscience....Then why not keep clear of sin instead of running away from death? If you aren’t fit to face death today, it’s very unlikely you will be tomorrow.” (*The Imitation of Christ*, 1, 23, 1.)
 - “Since however we know not the day nor the hour, on Our Lord's advice we must be constantly vigilant so that, having finished the course of our earthly life, we may merit to enter into the marriage feast with Him and to be numbered among the blessed and that we may not be ordered to go into eternal fire like the wicked and slothful servant, into the exterior darkness where ‘there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth’.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 48 §3)
- **1020**
 - “Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy spirit, who was poured out upon you. Go forth, faithful Christian! May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God in Zion, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints...May you return to [your Creator] who formed you from the dust of the earth. May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints come to meet you as you go forth from this life...May you see your Redeemer face to face.” (*Order of Christian Funerals*, Prayer of Commendation)
- **1021-1022 Particular Judgment**
 - “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27)
 - At death, the will can no longer make decisions for or against God, it is now fixed in its current state.
 - Immediately after death the eternal destiny of that person is judged by God in accordance with his works and faith - this is the Particular Judgment.
 - We will not get to barter or explain or make excuses, we will know what we deserve.
 - Reward for those who persevere in grace and are wholly sanctified: Heaven

- Purification that leads to reward for those who persevere in grace, but are not wholly sanctified: Purgatory and then heaven
 - Punishment for those who persist in denying God's love and mercy until their last moment in life (final impenitence): Hell
- **1023-1029 Heaven**
 - Who? - Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified.
 - Heaven is the perfect communion of life with the Blessed Trinity and all the angels and saints.
 - It is our deepest longing and desire and it is our ultimate end and fulfillment.
 - When we persevere in God's grace, we grasp our greatest possible achievement.
 - God has placed a desire for union with him in our very nature.
 - Heaven has been opened to man by Christ's death and Resurrection.
 - Heaven is beyond all understanding and description.
 - "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)
 - Beatific Vision
 - Fulfillment of our union with God.
 - Fully share in the Trinitarian life.
 - We will see God as he is.
 - It is God's total gift of himself to us.
 - In heaven, we will eternally behold the limitless beauty of God.
 - Even though nothing will be hidden of God to us, as creatures we still will not be able to grasp the totality of the Creator.
 - Our knowledge of God in heaven will be direct, but not comprehensive.
 - We are still creatures in heaven, and he is still the Creator.
- **1030-1032 Purgatory**
 - Who? - Those who die in God's grace and friendship, but are not perfectly purified.
 - **1030** All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.
 - Purgatory is not a third permanent destination
 - Only Heaven and Hell are permanent
 - Those in Purgatory are guaranteed Heaven (they have sanctifying grace in their souls)
 - **1031** The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire: As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.
 - Penance not completed on earth will be completed after death, but before entrance into Heaven
 - **1032** This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of

the dead: Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.

- **1033-1037 Hell**
 - Who? - Those who die with the guilt of mortal sin.
 - It is the definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the angels and saints.
 - Man, whose one overarching longing is for union with God, in hell is eternally deprived of the one for whom he craves,
 - The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.
 - When we reject God fully we sink to our worst possible failure.
 - Eternal punishment in hell does not happen by accident, it is the choice of the person through unrepented mortal sin (final impenitence).
 - “God predestines no one to go to hell.” (CCC 1037)
 - We should not become morbidly preoccupied with hell and become tempted to despair of salvation – we should always rely on God’s mercy.
 - We should not pretend that hell could not possibly be our destination and become tempted to presume of our salvation – we should always remember God’s justice.
- **1431-1434 Penance**
 - **1431** Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of his grace.
 - **1432** Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him...The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced: Let us fix our eyes on Christ’s blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.
 - **1434** Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*.
 - **Penance and Reparation: A Lenten Meditation** But if we press the question: Why does God want it? Then we must say, because in His mysterious wisdom, His justice requires it...Having given us a free will, if we abuse liberty, we must use our freedom to repay to God the love we have stolen from Him and repair the damage we have done.
 - Mortal sin causes two kinds of punishments (consequences)
 - Eternal punishment
 - Hell
 - Temporal punishments
 - How sin wounds others or even ourselves
 - Not eternal – remittance happens in the world or purgatory
 - God wants to forgive us (remittance of eternal punishment) and heal us (remittance of temporal punishments)
- **1680-1690 Christian Funerals**
 - For a Christian, death begins the fulfillment of new birth in Baptism and completes his conformity to Jesus Christ.
 - The Church is at his side to place him “into the Father’s hands.”
 - Funerals are celebrated in order to express communion with the one who has died and should draw the faithful into the true perspective of faith in the risen Christ.

- Funerals are celebrated in order to ask the Father to purify the deceased of his sins and their consequences and to admit him into heaven.