

## **THE FOUR LAST THINGS: A Catechesis on Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell**

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When we speak of the Four Last Things, we are specifically talking about Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. This outline is meant to be a brief overview of what the Church teaches on these, as well as what she teaches about several related topics such as Purgatory, the Resurrection of the Body, the New Heaven and New Earth, Qualities of the Glorified Body, etc.

Please see **paragraph #’s 988 – 1060** of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or **paragraph #’s 152-165 of YOUCAT** for more information on these teachings.

### **I. Death**

- A. The separation of body and soul
- B. The end of earthly life
- C. The 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 from the beginning.
- E. We would have been immune from suffering and death if man had not sinned.
- F. Despite this, 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
- 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
- J. **Death puts an end to human life as the time to either accept or reject divine grace.**

### **II. Judgment**

#### **A. Particular Judgment**

- 1. 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

2. 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

B. The Final Judgment

1. Resurrection of the dead of both the just and the unjust will precede the Last Judgment.
2. Then Christ will come in glory, and all the angels with Him, to judge the living and the dead.
3. The Final Judgment will show forth God's justice over all injustices that creatures have committed.
4. All the nations will be gathered before Him.
5. The Final 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
6. God knows the hour of His coming, we do not. Jesus was very clear on this.
7. This calls us to conversion. "Now is the acceptable time..." – 2 Cor. 6: 2

### III. Hell

- A. Hell is the definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed.
- B. It is 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. Sacred Scripture, particularly Jesus' own words, as well as the dogma of the Catholic Faith, affirm the existence of hell.
- E. The 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 Thess. 1:9
- F. There are other secondary, yet terrible punishments as well. The children at Fatima were given a glimpse of the horrors of Hell by the Blessed Virgin Mary, who had already promised them that they would go to Heaven. They were shown this by the Mother of God so that they would pray for the conversion of poor sinners, by which is meant

those in mortal sin, and so that they would tell other people to pray for the conversion of sinners.

G. God does not desire anyone to hell. God desires that all people be saved. – 2 Pt. 3: 9

H. However, God does not override our free will. We must freely choose His divine love....which means we can also reject it.

I. In the Eucharistic Liturgy we pray that God will save us from damnation.

**“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

#### IV. Purgatory

A. This is the purification undergone by those who die in God’s grace and friendship (sanctifying grace), but are still imperfectly purified at the time of death.

B. Purgatory shows forth both God’s justice and mercy.

C. This purification is entirely different from that of the damned.

D. This teaching is 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 Maccabees 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 the 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? Those in Heaven don’t need our prayers. For those in Hell, prayer will do no good.

E. The doctrine of Purgatory is 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...the Church Suffering (those in Purgatory), depend on the Church Triumphant (those in Heaven) and on the Church Militant (the baptized on earth) to pray for them.



- 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. Heaven**

- A. Heaven is perfect life with the Holy 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. The greatest joy of Heaven will be the beatific vision! There will also be all kinds of secondary (but still great and wonderful) joys and pleasures. The greatest joys of heaven do not rule out the lesser, but still wonderful joys!
- E. Heaven fulfills all of the deepest human longings!
- F. 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)
- G. 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
- H. Heaven had been closed to us by sin. By His death and resurrection, Christ has opened Heaven to us.
- I. 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
- J. “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
- K. God wants all of us to make it to Heaven, 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.” - John 14:2-3

## **VI. The New Heaven and the New Earth**

- A. In Heaven there will be no more pain, suffering, or tears.
- B. Rather, there will be everlasting happiness, peace, & communion with God and all those in Heaven.

C. The visible universe will be transformed – CCC 638

D. God will be “all in all.” – 1 Cor. 5: 28

E. Qualities of the glorified body as traditionally taught by St. Thomas Aquinas. We also see them in Jesus’ risen body in the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels, as well as from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 35-58, though in different words than St. Thomas used more than a millennium later. It has been my experience that students, from little children to teenagers, 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.” – Philippians 3:21.

Note: Everyone will have a resurrected body. We say in the Nicene Creed, “I look forward to the resurrection of the body...”, but only those in Heaven will have glorified resurrected bodies. The resurrected bodies of every human being in Hell will also conform to the states of their souls.

1. Identity – Glorified bodies will be that of the same person before he/she died. We will keep our original identity, however, our risen bodies won’t look the same as they did in this life. (Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-35, John. 20:11-16)
2. Integrity – Glorified bodies will have all their parts, regardless of how the person died. Our bodies will be complete. (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:24-28) Their will be no bodily defects or disabilities in our glorified bodies.
3. Quality – The glorified body will appear as in the prime of life (only better) and will, of course, retain the gender God gave it from the moment that it was conceived. (Revelation 1:12-18)
4. Agility – The glorified body will be able to be wherever it wants to be, when it wants to be there. (Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-43, Acts 1:9)
5. Subtlety – Matter will not act as a hindrance to the glorified body. The glorified body will be able to pass through objects. This is a real body, not merely the appearance of a body, not a ghost, but a real body. (John 20:19)
6. Impassibility – No more pain, suffering, no corruption or decaying, or wearing out of the body, and every tear will be wiped away. (1 Corinthians 50-57, Revelation 21:4)
7. Clarity/Brilliance – Every glorified body will be beautiful beyond our imagining. No matter how that body may have

looked while in this world. They will be magnificently brilliant, stunningly so! (1 Corinthians 40-41, Revelation 1:12-18, Revelation 4:2-4)

## **VII. Great Helps to Holiness and to Heaven**

- A. Faith in Christ and Baptism
- B. Holy Mass every Sunday & Holy Day of Obligation and frequent reception of the Most Holy Eucharist . We must be in a state of sanctifying grace when receiving the Eucharist.
- C. Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance.
- D. Obedience to the Church
- E. True devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, the Holy Angels, and the Saints
- F. Daily prayer, the Rosary, the value of sacramentals
- G. Formation in the truth
- H. The practice of the virtues / Doing good and avoiding evil
- I. Keeping of the Commandments
- J. Penance and almsgiving
- K. Commitment to the poor and vulnerable (in a special way the unborn)

## **VIII. Some Recommended Reading**

- A. The Bible
- B. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Paragraphs 988 – 1060)
- C. *Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Heaven But Never Dreamed Of Asking* – by Dr. Peter Kreeft – Ignatius Press
- D. *The Four Last Things* – By St. Thomas More – Scepter Publishers
- E. *Beginning Apologetics, Volume 8: The End Times: What Catholics Believe About the Second Coming, the Rapture, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and Indulgences* – By Fr. Frank Chacon and Mr. Jim Burnham – San Juan Catholic Seminars
- F. *The Last Things* – By Dr. Regis Martin – Ignatius Press
- G. *The Lamb's Supper* – By Dr. Scott Hahn – Doubleday Press
- H. *The Divine Comedy* – By Dante Alighieri
- I. *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Great Divorce, and The Screwtape Letters* – All by C.S. Lewis