

## FUNERAL LESSON – RCIA

### The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell

#### Meaning of Christian Death

- Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning; if we have died with him, we will also live with him.
  - What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already “died with Christ” sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ’s grace, physical death completes this “dying with Christ: and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act. **(CCC1010)**
- In death, God calls man to himself. Therefore the Christian can experience a desire for death like St. Paul’s; “My desire is to depart and be with Christ.” He can transform his own death into an act of obedience and love towards the Father, after the example of Christ. **(CCC1011)**
- **Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our early dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven. (CCC1012)**
- Living a Christ like life and taking advantage of Confession while we are alive makes the inevitability of death not as frightening as it could be.

#### Judgment

- The Particular Judgment: The eternal retribution received by each soul at the moment of death, in accordance with that person’s faith and works.
- The Last Judgment: God’s triumph over the revolt of evil, after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world. Preceded by the resurrection of the dead, it will coincide with the second coming of Christ in glory at the end of time, disclose good and evil and reveal the meaning of salvation history and the providence of God by which justice has triumphed over evil.

## Purgatory

The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God-it is not “produced” by the parents – and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final resurrection. **(CCC366)**

- In the Old Testament (**2Maccabees12:39-46**) the people did not call it “Purgatory” but they obviously believed that the sins of the dead could be atoned for by the living.
- Early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen (circa 150-230) both wrote of our lesser sins being burned away to allow the soul to enter heaven in a perfect state.
- Christ descends into Hell, Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek). \* **(CCC633 Ez32:17-32)**
- 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. **(CCC1030)**
- The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned...**(CCC1031 1Cor3:15/1Pet1:7)**
- We who are left behind can live peacefully because we know that our loved one has been ushered into their afterlife by the prayers of the church.
- Asking OBV Mary and the saints to pray for those still on earth or the souls of our deceased is very efficacious.
- We can always pray to God and to Jesus and we should. But just as we ask others to pray for us or a suffering loved one, we have access to the prayers of Mary and the Saints who were human like ourselves.
- In the Parable of Rich Man and Lazarus. **(Lk 16:19-31)** Then Abraham said, “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.”
- Jesus did everything his mother Mary asked of him. He was the perfect obedient child. He returned with her from the temple in Jerusalem when she and Joseph had spent three days searching for him. **(Lk2:51)**
  - At the wedding feast in Cana Jesus changed the water into wine at Mary’s request. **(Jn2:11)**
  - He still listens to her requests for our needs. He made Mary and the saints holy and so their prayers for our benefit are important to him.

## Heaven

- By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has “opened” heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community for all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ. **(CCC1026)**
- Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man’s immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory “the beatific vision”;  
How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be Honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ Your Lord and God, ...to delight in the joy of immortality in the kingdom of Heaven with the righteous and God’s friends. **(CCC1028)**
- Scripture helps us to understand the concept of heaven:
  - **1Tim6:11-16** must be understood to mean either that man unaided by grace cannot see God, or that man can never “see” God with his physical powers of sight using his eyes. In other words, man cannot see God in any sense with his natural powers. The saints and all of the blessed can be said to have “seen” and that they do “see” the divine essence with a directly intuited, intellectual vision.
  - **Rev22-3** - “And there shall be no curse anymore, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their forehead.”
  - **1Cor13:12** – “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”
  - **Matt5:8** – “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
  - **1Jn3:2** – “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

## Hell

- God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a **willful turning away from God** (a mortal sin) is necessary, **and persistence in it until the end**. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the church implores the mercy of God who does not want “any to perish, but all to come to repentance” **(2Pet3:9)**:

Father, accept this offering from your whole family. Grant us your peace in this life, save us from final damnation, and count us among those you have chosen.

**(CCC1037)**

- No other religious issue gets as much thought and attention as Hell. Everyone is concerned about what will happen to them after they die.
- As a result there is a great deal to be read about it. The following are excerpts from an article by Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego. It has the approval of the church through a Nihil Obstat (nothing contrary to faith or morals) and Imprimatur (church permission to print or publish)
  - (many sects) have rejected or modified the doctrine of hell so radically that it is no longer a serious threat. In recent decades, this decay has even invaded mainstream Evangelicalism and a number of major Evangelical figures have advocated the view that there is no eternal hell-the wicked will simply be annihilated.
  - But the eternal nature of hell is stressed in the New Testament. ... Hell is not just a theoretical possibility. Jesus warns us that real people go there. He says in **(Matt7:13-14)** , “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”
  - The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The teaching of the church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ 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.” **(CCC 1035)**
  - In his 1994 book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope John Paul II wrote that Too often “preachers, catechists, teachers...no longer have the courage to preach the threat of hell.” (p. 183)

- The early church Fathers were also absolutely firm on the reality of an eternal hell, as the following quotes show.

**Justin Martyr** (Christian apologist, born in Syria, about 100 AD, converted to Christianity about A. D. 140, taught and defended the Christian religion in Asia Minor and at Rome, where he suffered martyrdom about the year 165.)

**“No more is it possible for the evildoer, the avaricious and the treacherous to hide from God than it is for the virtuous. Every man will receive the eternal punishment or reward which his actions deserve. Indeed, if all men recognized this no one would choose evil even for a short time, knowing that he would incur the eternal sentence of fire. On the contrary, he would take every means to control himself and to adorn himself in virtue, so that he might obtain the good gifts of God and escape the punishments.”** (First Apology 12 [A.D. 151]). ...

**Irenaeus** (Was the Bishop of Lyons. He was born in Asia, in the first half of the second century. It is certain that while still very young, Irenaeus had seen and heard the holy Bishop Polycarp (d155) at Smyrna.)

**“[God will] send the spiritual forces of wickedness, and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, and the impious, unjust, lawless, and blasphemous among men into everlasting fire.”** (Against Heresies 1:10:1 [A.D. 189]). **“The penalty increases for those who do not believe the Word of God and despise his coming...[I]t is not merely temporal, But eternal. To whomsoever the Lord shall say, ‘depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire,’ they will be damned forever.”** (ibid., 4:28:2).

**Tertullian** (Considered to be a church Father, Tertullian was a prolific early Christian writer and apologist. He became a lawyer and a priest.)

**“After the present age is ended he will judge his worshipers for a reward of eternal life and the godless for a fire equally perpetual and unending.”** Apology 18:3 [A.D. 197]). **“Then will the entire race of men be restored to receive its just deserts according to what it has merited in this period of good and evil, and thereafter to have these paid out in an immeasurable and unending eternity. Then there will be neither death again nor resurrection again, but we shall be always the same as we are now, without changing. The worshipers of God shall always be with God, clothed in the proper substance of eternity. But the godless and those who have not turned wholly to God will be punished in fire equally unending, and they shall have from the very nature of this fire, divine as it were, a supply of incorruptibility.”** (ibid., 44:12-13).

## Preparing for a Funeral

- We are never prepared to deal with the details of a funeral.
- There is a specific process which must be followed for a Catholic funeral.
- The very first thing must be to contact the priest of your parish. We must reach out to him for guidance, both practical and spiritual.
- The first practical matter is to find the day and time that the funeral Mass or service may be held. Every parish has active events and schedules to take into consideration.
- Once the day and time is chosen, the readings, music and other logistical issues must be decided. The funeral home will handle the logistical procedures outside of the church, but the priest is responsible for the procedures within the church.

### Rosary Vigil

- This is the usual way in which family and friends remember the deceased in an informal, loving way.
- It may be led by a priest, deacon or lay person.
- It may be a rosary or prayer service.
- Comments by family and friends, video's, etc. are very acceptable ways for the family to remember their loved one and share their memories and love with others.
- Flowers are often sent to the funeral home and displayed. Prayer cards may be given to those who attend.
  - The flowers which are brought to the church for display should be taken home by the family if possible.
  - A bouquet or two may be donated to the church to honor our BVM and/or Sacred Heart.

### Mass

- The priest wears vestments of white, violet or black. Often the pall covering the coffin matches the priest's vestments such as at St. Philip. \*
- At the funeral liturgy the church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. **The funeral liturgy, therefore, is an act of worship and not merely an expression of grief. (USCCB)**
- As an act of worship certain conditions must be considered as to what may or may not be done during the service. Appropriate music which is indicative of the

resurrection and everlasting life is preferred. The music should be uplifting and hopeful for the mourners.

- No matter which liturgical season we happen to be in on the day of the funeral, the ritual reminds us that we are not merely grieving over a loved one's loss, but celebrating his/her entrance through death into the resurrection of Christ.
- When the casket enters the sanctuary the priest blesses the casket with holy water and incense, liturgical gestures that remind or teaches the faithful that their prayers are rising to heaven so that the deceased's soul may also ascend to be with God. Sometimes a crucifix may be placed on the casket.
- After being blessed, the casket is brought to the front of the sanctuary and positioned in front of the paschal candle, which is another reminder of the light of Christ dispelling the darkness of death and promising eternal life. (casket turned)
- Eulogies to the deceased are not a part of traditional Catholic funeral services. As noted earlier, they should be included in the vigil or rosary service held before the funeral Mass. Some parishes allow family members to give brief remembrances following communion or just before the concluding rites.
- A eulogy is not liturgical. The Mass should be concentrated on what God is saying about the person and the family, and his mercy for the soul of the deceased.

## **Burial or Cremation & Organ donation**

### **Burial**

- The preferred method of internment.
- The bodies of the dead must be **treated with respect** and charity in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy. It honors the **children of God** who are temples of the Holy Spirit. (CCC2300)

### **Cremation**

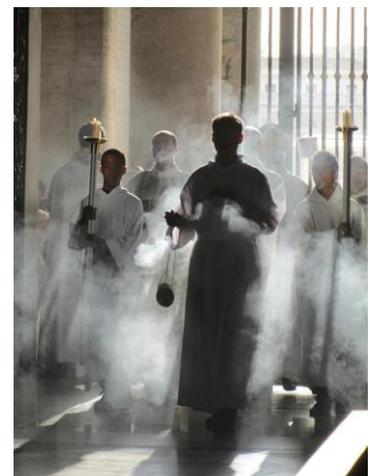
- For most of its 2,000 year history, the Catholic Church only permitted burial, arguing it best expressed the Christian hope of resurrection.
  - **But in 1963, the Vatican explicitly allowed cremation as long as it didn't suggest a denial of faith about resurrection.**

- Placement of the ashes of the departed who through Baptism became temples of the Holy Spirit should be placed in a proper Urn and kept in a consecrated location.
- October 25, 2016 the Vatican published guidelines for Catholics who want to be cremated.
  - The guidelines say that the remains may not be scattered, divided into separate locations, or kept at home on the mantel. Catholic human remains should be stored in a sacred, church approved place. **(Spirit & Truth 1-15-17)**
  - Church authorities should designate a sacred place, such as a cemetery or church area (columbarium) to hold them.
- Burial is still preferred but the church is trying to counter new ideas which are contrary to the Catholic faith. These ideas have emerged since the 1963 Vatican II council.
  - These include the new-age concept that death is a “fusion” with Mother Nature and the universe, or the “definitive liberation” from the prison of the body.
- Since these new instructions require that the remains be kept together;
  - It brings up the issue of the centuries old practice of parts of saints bodies being scattered in churches throughout the world.
  - Though this is no longer favored by the church it is not practical to insist that those church communities return the parts to the primary resting place of the saint. This could create war among the faithful in those locations!

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/vatican-catholic-cremation-1.3820336?cmp=rss>

## Organ Donation

The free gift of organs after death is legitimate and can be meritorious.



**Let my prayer rise like incense!**