THE FOUR LAST THINGS

OBJECTIVE: TO PRESENT THE CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE ULTIMATE DESTINY OF THE HUMAN PERSON AS THEY MOVE THROUGH LIFE TOWARDS DEATH, THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT, AND ETERNAL LIFE.

I. From the very beginning of Christianity belief in death and resurrection of the body has been an essential teaching of Catholicism (CCC 991).
   A. Hope in the bodily resurrection of the dead follows faith in God who is Creator of the whole person, body and soul (CCC 992).
      1. God is the God of the living, not the God of the dead (CCC 993).
      2. "Jesus links faith in the resurrection to his own person: 'I am the Resurrection and the life'" (Jn 11:25) (CCC 994).
   B. Death is a reminder that we only have a limited time to live this life on earth (CCC 1013).
      1. "Death is the end of earthly life" (CCC 1007).
      2. The teaching of the Catholic Church states that death entered the world because of sin. Thus, it was contrary to God's original plan at the creation of man and woman (CCC 1008).
      3. The obedience of Jesus Christ through the Paschal Mystery transformed the curse of death into a blessing (CCC 1009).
   C. Through our Baptism eternal life begins in time. This participation of the heavenly life of the risen Christ remains "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3; cf Phil 3:20) (CCC 1003).
   D. "Our participation in the Eucharist already gives us a foretaste of Christ's transfiguration of our bodies." In this reality we "possess the hope of resurrection" (St. Irenaeus, Adv. haeres. 4, 18, 4-5: PG 7/1, 1028-1029) (CCC 1000).

II. In death God calls all people to Himself (CCC 1011).
   A. "By death the soul is separated from the body" (CCC 1016).
      1. The human body decays and the soul goes to meet God.
      2. The soul encounters God in the particular judgment. At this time our life is evaluated in relation to Christ.
      3. The soul will receive in the particular judgment either entrance into blessedness (heaven); or a time of purification (purgatory); or everlasting damnation (hell) (CCC 1022). These are the four last things.
         a. Heaven is for those who have been purified of self and are ready to be united with Christ forever, seeing Him face to face (CCC 1023).
         b. Purgatory is an experience of purification for those who die in God's friendship but still need to be readied for the holiness necessary for final union with God (CCC 1031). Purgatory is the ultimate purgation of the self-needed in order to enter into divine union.
         c. Hell is the state of total self-exclusion from God. Because our hearts are created for God, this pain of eternal deprivation of His presence is excruciating.
   B. Those who die in the state of mortal sin experience the punishment of eternal separation from God (CCC 1035).
      1. "The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity" (CCC 1035).
      2. These teachings on hell remind us of our freedom and responsibility to choose the good and our future destiny (CCC 1036).
      3. These teachings are a constant reminder of our need for conversion (CCC 1036).

III. The Last Judgment is the time at which Christ will come in all His glory to judge the living and the dead.
   A. At the Last Judgment Christ will lay bare each person's relationship with God (CCC 1039).
      1. The good each person has accomplished will be revealed (CCC 1039).

2. The evil or lack of good people have failed to do will be as well disclosed (CCC 1039).
3. On the day of the last judgment each person will appear in his or her own body (CCC 1059).

B. "At the end of time the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness." Glorified in body and soul, the just will reign with Christ (CCC 1060).
   1. The material universe will be itself transformed (CCC 1060).
   2. God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28) in eternal life (CCC 1060).

IV. **No person knows the moment nor the hour when the Second Coming of Christ will occur.**
A. "By virtue of the 'communion of saints,' the Church commends the dead to God's mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf" (CCC 1055).
   1. The Church prays that no person die separated from God (CCC 1058).
   2. God desires all people to be saved (CCC 1058).
B. No person can save him- or herself. Each is saved in and through the grace of Christ.
   1. We are commended to pray for ourselves at the hour of our death.
   2. We are commended to pray for the souls in purgatory.