

Introduction to the four week class

Over the course of these four Tuesdays we will cover the Biblical and Apostolic Teaching on:

- Death,
- Our Particular Judgment
- Purgatory
- The End Times
- The deception of the Anti-Christ
- The Second Coming of Christ
- The Last Judgment,
- the Resurrection of the Body,
- Hell,
- Heaven
- And we will conclude with the New Heavens and the New Earth

This is known as Eschatology, the study of the last things.

Why study these things?

- What we believe about the next life gives meaning and purpose to this life.

In this lesson we will explain Catholic Church teaching on:

- Death
- Our Particular Judgment
- And Purgatory

So let us begin by exploring the Christian understanding of the mystery of death.

Death

Death is the separation of the soul from the body

- Thus, it is the destruction of the human being

Death is not natural

- that is why it is painful, sad and why we fear it

Even though man's nature is mortal,

- God had destined him **not** to die.
- Death was contrary to the plans of God.

So what happened?

- We sinned
- And Death is a consequence of sin (Genesis 2:17)

Death meant eternal separation from God and from one another

God could not simply remove this consequence

What do we try to teach our kids?

Actions have consequences

Look at the position we put God in...

God took on and fulfilled the consequences of our sin for us

God became one of us

- He bore the consequences of our sin,
- He suffered our death
- And He rose on the third day

Jesus gives His Spirit to us in Baptism

- So that anyone who dies with His Spirit rises from the dead

As St. Paul writes in Romans 8:11

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you.

By His death and Resurrection Jesus Christ has transformed our death,

Because of Christ,

- death no longer means eternal separation from God,
- death no longer means eternal separation of our soul from our body
- Christian death is now the door through which we reach heaven and perfect happiness

In fact, the Christian who unites his own death to that of Jesus

- views it as a step towards Him
- and an entrance into everlasting life

As Paul beautifully wrote to the Philippians 1:21

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ”

Death lends certain urgency to our lives.

Remembering our mortality helps us realize that

- I have a limited amount of time to become the person God created me to be

In his 15th-century spiritual classic *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas a Kempis writes:

“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 Particular Judgment

Immediately after death

- Each person will receive from God
- Our eternal reward or eternal punishment
- Based on our faith and our love

This is called our particular judgment

The result of our judgment will be:

- Entrance into the blessedness of heaven,
 - either immediately
 - or after the purification known as Purgatory,
- or immediate and everlasting damnation.”

Scripture and Tradition repeatedly affirm that we will be judged not only by our faith but also by our deeds

Jesus was very clear about this when He taught:

“the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” John 5:28-29

And as St. John of the Cross said:

“In the evening of our lives we will be judged by our love”

These are just a few of the passages from the Bible that teach we are judged by not only by our faith but also by our love, by what we have done and what we have failed to do.

Mt 25; 2 Cor 5:8; Lk 16:22; 23:43; Mt 16:26; Phil 1:23; Galatians 5:6; Heb 9:27; 12:23).

Fulfilling our heart's desires

We should understand our particular judgment not so much as

- a courtroom with God sitting in Judgment
- but rather as God giving us what we wanted throughout our lives.

Pope Benedict XVI writes,

“With death, our life-choice becomes definitive – our life stands before the Judge. Our choice, which in the course of an entire life takes on a certain shape, can have a variety of forms. There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred, and have suppressed all love within themselves...In such people all would be beyond remedy and the destruction of good would be irrevocable: this is what we mean by the word Hell. On the other hand there can be people who are utterly pure, completely permeated by God, and thus fully open to their neighbors – people for whom communion with God even now gives direction to their entire being and whose journey towards God only brings to fulfillment what they already are.”

St. Catherine of Genoa puts it more simply:

- “The soul goes where it wants to go.”

Image of Judgment from CS Lewis Last Battle

Aslan comes to Judge all the creature of Narnia

Behind him stood all the stars so that Aslan's huge black shadow streamed away to his left

- As the creatures came rushing on
- They came right up to Aslan
- One or other of two things happened to each of them
- They all looked straight in his face
- And when some looked, the expression of their faces changed terribly...For some...
- It was fear and hatred
- And all the creatures that looked at Aslan in that way swerved to His left and disappeared into His huge black shadow

But the others looked in the face of Aslan and loved him

- All these swerved to His right, into the light and the doorway to Heaven

If at death the soul has spent its life seeking and choosing God,

- then it gets what it wanted – union with God in heaven.

On the other hand

- if a soul has spent its life choosing itself over and against God and neighbor,
- then at death it gets what it wanted:
- Itself and that is hell
- That is Hell

Our judgment is a reminder to pursue God and be generously open to the needs of others

The Holy Father continues by saying. . .

Yet there is another possibility that fits the majority of people

- in which the soul has chosen God but not fully.

In this case

- the soul needs to be purified of its disordered desires and attachments
- that prevent it from possessing God fully.

Therefore the Church teaches that

- those 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 heaven.

The Church gives the name **Purgatory** to this final purification.

“Purgatory” in the Bible

If the Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of Purgatory,

- Then why is the word Purgatory not in the Bible?

The doctrine or reality of purgatory is in the Bible

But the word Purgatory is not

- Because “Purgatory” comes from the Latin word Purgatorium

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek

The Bible **does** speak of an afterlife that is neither Heaven nor Hell

The Hebrew word for this place is Sheol

The Greek word for this place is Hades

The New Testament word for Hell is Gehenna

- Or the lake of fire which is the Hell of the damned

Hades is not Hell

- It is distinct from Gehenna

In fact, the Book of Revelation describes how,

- at the end of time,
- death and hades are thrown into hell (gehenna).
- This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Scripture teaches that at the end of time, there is no more death;

- and once the purification of all souls has taken place,
- there is no more need for hades.

This same concept of

- sheol (in Hebrew),
- hades (in Greek),
- and purgatorium (in Latin)

- is purgatory as we have come to know it today

[More Biblical passages that speak of Hades:](#)

Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:27,31; Revelation 1:18;
Rev 6:8; Rev 20:13-14

[Now let's turn to the way the New Testament describes purgatory](#)

In chapter 3 of his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the reality of Purgatory in this way:

[“For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble—each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work, which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”](#) 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

The “Day” refers to our particular judgment

- And notice how it is described as a fiery trial

What else could St. Paul be referring to but Purgatory?

He can't be referring to hell,

- because it's clear that the people who undergo this "purifying fire" will be saved,
- while those who are in hell are lost forever.

And yet he can't be referring to heaven,

- because he mentions the suffering of loss,
- while in heaven every tear will be wiped away

Scripture teaches that God is a "consuming fire"

In the presence of God who is a consuming fire of Love

- our misguided desires
- that which is "stubble, hay and wood"
- will be purified and directed completely to Him

As God draws us to himself after death,

- there is a process of purification in the fire of God's holy presence.

This purification is necessary according to the true nature of justification, which involves

- not simply being declared clean
- but actually being *made* clean,
- since nothing unclean or unholy enters heaven (cf. **Revelation 21:27**)

1st Corinthians is not the only Biblical reference to Purgatory

In fact Jesus spoke of the reality of purgatory in his teaching

Let's look at this now

Jesus and Purgatory

As Christ teaches about the importance of forgiveness,

- He gives the example in chapter 18 of the Gospel of Matthew
- of a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.
- He brought in a man who owed a great deal of money and forgave him the debt.
- The forgiven man in turn went out and met one of his fellow servants,
- who owed him but a fraction of the amount,
- and demanded repayment.
- The just king summoned his slave back and said:

“You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you? And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Mt 18:32-35)

In other words, Jesus the King is saying,

- I have forgiven you – yet you have not purified your heart of selfishness, and a disordered love for created things.
- Therefore you must be cleansed of this to receive complete union with God

In the Sermon on the Mount,

- Jesus challenges His followers to make peace with one another,
- so that they will not be handed over to the judge
- and **be** put in prison until they have paid their full debt.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:23-26

In Matthew 12: 31-32 Jesus speaks of sin **that will be** forgiven in the age to come.

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

St. Gregory the Great says,

“As for 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 the age to come**. From this sentence we understood that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.”

Understanding Purgatory

Scripture speaks of God's love as a raging or consuming fire

For example, Deuteronomy chapter 4:24 and Hebrews chapter 12:29 describe God as a consuming fire

And the Song of Songs chapter 8 says that

- the flames of God's love are a blazing fire (NAB)

Burning love is not difficult to understand

- **for** we speak of human love as burning like a fire.

This is a powerfully descriptive way to communicate the passionate love God has for each and every person

God is love

- and His love is a passionate consuming fire.

We were made for perfect union with God

But because of original sin we have a fallen human nature

- We become attached to things in the wrong way
- This prevents us from possessing God fully

Throughout our life, if we draw closer to God and the Fire of His love

- A desire grows within us to get rid of anything and everything that keeps us from Him
- Because nothing compares to the possession of God

As we encounter God's love in this life He begins to draw us

- We become willing to let go of all that stands between us.
- This is the purifying fire of God's love

By this encounter the purifying process begins

- and is to be completed with death

In fact, death is the last great act of detachment,

- letting go and giving oneself completely to God.

Yet most people have not completed this purifying process before death

- And most die still clinging to the things of this world

But God continues to draw us after death by the power of His raging love.

And as we are drawn nearer and nearer

- Our imperfect and lesser loves are burned away by His desire for us
- And by our desire for Him

That is why the journey of this life and the reality of purgatory is a journey of desire

- The desire to possess God fully

How do we increase our desire for God?

1. The more I have of something the more I want
 - Go and receive God in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist as often as you can
 - And your desire for Him will grow
2. We increase our desire for a thing by thinking about it, dwelling on it
 - Isn't this how advertising works?

If we give time and attention

- to reflecting on the goodness of God over all things
- we begin to desire Him more and more
- and the things of this world less and less

This is the purpose of Daily Meditation

3. At the same time we must curb our disordered desires

Practice fasting in a new way

- Temper your intake or fast from
- Food; Drink; Entertainment; News; Sports; Gossip; Activity; pornography
- So that your desire for God will grow

This is precisely why we make a resolution

- A Resolution is practically how we may detach ourselves from the things we place ahead of the love of God

Helping Those in Purgatory

The Church is the family of God

- joined together by the Holy Spirit

In this family

God our Father enables His children to help one another

- By their prayer, work, joy, suffering and sacrifice

God accepts these gifts from his children

- And uses them to bring grace to our brothers and sisters in need
- Whether on earth
- Or in Purgatory

In this way we can help the poor souls in Purgatory to reach heaven

- Especially by offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for their purification

The fact that we can help those who have died goes all the way back to the Old Testament

In chapter 12 of 2 Maccabees, we read that

- faithful Jews prayed for their fallen comrades after a battle

The Bible describes this as an honorable deed,

- and the passage closes with the statement,

“Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Mac. 12:45).

This passage illustrates the Jewish belief that

- prayer for the dead was helpful to them
- and pleasing to God

This belief continued into Christian times and so the Church teaches that:

“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.” 1032

Conclusion

Don't focus on yourself or your sinfulness

Focus on God – the River of Divine Delight

- And you will be drawn to Him
- And All else will fall away