

LESSON 27: THE FOUR LAST THINGS

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 8	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Intermediate Level / Age 11	:	Cover points 1 to 8
For Advanced Level / Age 14	:	Cover points 1 to 10

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned about the liturgical calendar of the Church and how it takes us through the important events in the saving work of Jesus every year. All of us who are a part of the Church look forward to the fullness of heaven as we journey with the Church throughout our lives. In this lesson, we learn about the four last things that all human beings will have to face at the end of their lives.

Current lesson:

1. Sacred Tradition speaks of the four last things that mark the end of human life on earth: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.
2. As human beings, we were created to be both material and spiritual beings. This means that there are two important components to our makeup: body and spirit. Death is when your body expires, and your soul/spirit becomes disembodied. Your body will start to decompose, but your soul will live on forever (eventually being reunited with your body at the final resurrection).
3. As baptised Christians, we will continue to experience physical death even though we are cleansed of Original Sin. As a result of the fall, human nature has been weakened and wounded, subject to ignorance, suffering, the domination of death, and the inclination to sin and evil (CCC 405, 418). This is called “concupiscence”, and the physical death that we continue to experience despite our baptism is because of concupiscence. Furthermore, death puts an end to the time an individual has been granted for embracing God’s grace or rejecting it.

CCC 1013-4: “Death is the end of man’s earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When the single course of our earthly life is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: ‘It is appointed for men to die once.’ There is no ‘reincarnation’ after death. The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death...”

4. Catholicism distinguishes between two kinds of judgments after our bodily death. The first is the *particular judgment* (CCC 1022), determining the fate of the soul at death. The second one is the *last* (or *general*) *judgment* (CCC 1038-1040), which will occur when Christ returns and is upon mankind as a whole.

Hebrews 9:27: “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

CCC 1022: “Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven – through a purification or immediately – or immediate and everlasting damnation.”

5. The last judgment happens upon the return of Christ, at which all will be judged corporately and publicly. According to Sacred Scripture this is clearly separate and distinct from the particular judgment. Just as the time of reckoning arrives at last for the individual, so it does for the world as a whole. This future day will bring the end of the present age with what the Church calls the last judgment. On that day, as the Creed proclaims, Christ “will return in glory to judge the living and the dead” (see Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-13).

CCC 1038: “The resurrection of all the dead, ‘of both the just and the unjust’ (Acts 24:15), will precede the Last Judgment. This will be ‘the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of man’s] 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). Then Christ will come ‘in his glory, and all the angels with him... Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life’ (Matthew 25:31, 32, 46).”

CCC 1040: “We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which [God’s] Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgment will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by His creatures and that God’s love is stronger than death.”

6. Upon physical death, the soul of the deceased, without its body, goes to hell or to heaven. Entrance into the heavenly state may be direct or via purgatory (i.e. purification). In either case, one must be free of all sin to qualify. Those who see God face to face are said to have received the “Beatific Vision”, which is precisely what is being said of the Virgin Mary and all the saints whom we venerate.

CCC 1023-4: “Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God forever, for they see him as he is, face to face... This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity – this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed – is called Heaven. Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.”

CCC 1030-31: “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. The Church gives the

name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned...”

7. It is important to always live a good life and to love God and people around us. Even if we think we are young, the fact is, we can never know when our lives will be over. Many young people die at the most unexpected ages and in the most unexpected circumstances. And it is not possible for a person who has intentionally ignored God and lived an immoral life to repent once his earthly life is over.

CCC 393: “...there is no repentance for men after death.”

8. Heaven and hell are quite literal in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as states of being designated for those who have accepted God’s love and those who have turned away from Him. Both states are determined to be eternal – that is, everlasting life or everlasting damnation. Although heaven seems to be regarded by many as a “place”, it is not to be understood as a place in the way we usually think, as it sits outside time and space.
9. The Church believes that those who are alive can assist the holy souls who are going through purgation in preparation for heaven, by virtue of our eternal communion. This can be done in two ways: A) praying for them, and B) offering Masses for them.
10. There are certain groups of Protestants who believe in a doctrine of the “rapture”. The Catholic Church neither teaches nor believes in this teaching. The “rapture” is an interpretation of Holy Scripture which is only about 130 years old. It is the idea that some believers will be snatched (raptured) up to heaven at the second coming of Christ. The concept of the “rapture” is based on a misinterpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 about being “taken up in the clouds” when Jesus returns.

Depending upon which Protestant group one is talking with, some expect the “rapture” to take place at the beginning of Jesus’ thousand-year (millennium) reign and they will reign with Him, while others hold that the “rapture” will take place at the end of the thousand-year reign and will be followed immediately by the end of the world and the last judgment. There are even some who hold that the “rapture” will take place during the thousand-year reign. This has been a cause of great division among these various Protestant groups but is of little interest to Catholics. As Catholics, we focus our attention on the condition of the individual soul at the time of death rather than speculating on the timing of Jesus’ return. Scripture has informed us many times that the exact time of Jesus’ return cannot be predicted (Matthew 24:43; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4; Revelation 16:15). It is more important to focus on the way we are living our daily lives than on predicting when exactly Jesus will return.



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