

# Heaven, Death & Last Things

What the Church believes waits for us  
on the other side

# Timeline of Creation, Redemption, Perfection

- Eden/Paradise
- Sin & Death
- Christ & Redemption
- Baptism into Christ
- Death
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Fulfillment of Redemption
- General (Last) Judgment
- Heaven – The Perfecting of Creation

# Eden/Paradise

- Humanity lived in full communion with God
- Death is not in God's plan in original Creation

- “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.” *Genesis 1:26*
- “They heard the sound of the LORD walking in the garden at the time of the cooling breeze.” *Genesis 3:8*

# Death Comes Through Sin

- “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”  
*Genesis 2:17*
- “God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made them. But by the envy of the Devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.”  
*Wisdom 2:23*

# Death Comes Through Sin

- “By the one man’s disobedience the many [that is, all people] were made sinners.”

*Romans 5:19*

- “Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.”

*Romans 5:12*

# From the Mass for the Dead

Almighty and eternal God,

it is at your summons that we come to birth

by your will that we are governed,

and at your command that we return,

**on account of sin,**

to that earth from which we came.

# The Example of Mary

## Immaculate Conception

- By the redeeming act of Christ, which occurs in history but exists outside of time, Mary is set free from the dominion of original sin from the moment of her conception in her mother's womb.

## Assumption

- Free from the dominion of original sin and filled with sanctifying grace from the moment of her conception, Mary also is free from experiencing the corruption of death at the end of her earthly life.

# Christ & Redemption

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead also has come through a human being;  
for as all die in Adam, so will all be made alive in Christ.

*1 Corinthians 15:21–22*





# Christ & Redemption

- In history, but effective outside of history.
- The holy ones of the Old Testament

“All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them.”  
*Hebrews 11:13*



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# Baptism

We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. *Romans 6:4–5*

Funeral Mass Entrance Rite  
The priest then sprinkles the remains with holy water saying:

**“In the waters of baptism  
Name died with Christ  
and rose with him to new  
life. May he/she now share  
with him eternal glory.”**

# The Church Now

The Pilgrim Church on Earth

The Church in Purgatory

The Church in Glory (Heaven)

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Hell

# The Communion(ity) of Saints

## *The Intercession of the Saints in Heaven*

- “Once received into their heavenly home and being present to the Lord, they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus.” *Vatican II (LG 49)*
- “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” *Hebrews 12:1*

# The Communion(ity) of Saints

## *Communion with the dead*

- “In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members [**we in this world**], from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored the dead...and she offers her suffrages for them.”
- “It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins.” *2 Maccabees 12:46*

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# Death as Ending and Beginning

- 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. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1013*
- “O God, who have set a limit to this earthly life, so as to open an entry into eternal life...”  
*Collect from the Mass for the Dead*



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# Particular (Personal) Judgment

- Each individual receives his or her eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his or her 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.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1022*

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# Immortality of the Soul & Resurrection of the Body

## Immortality of the Soul

- At the moment of death our immortal souls are separated from our perishable bodies, until the resurrection of all the dead and the General (Last) Judgment.
- The immortal soul is the “I” that makes the person.

## Resurrection of the Body

- “There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the righteous and the unrighteous.”  
*St Paul, Acts 24:15*
- The fulfillment of redemption for the saved, and condemnation for the damned.

# The State of Life of the Saved

- The Bible consistently speaks of those who have died as having “fallen asleep”. More awaits.
- Sleep does not mean inactivity, in the Catholic view.
- “Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” *Romans 14:8*
- “He is God, not of the dead, but of the living; **for to him all of them are alive.**” *Luke 20:39*

# First Eucharistic Prayer

Remember also, Lord,  
your servants **N.** and **N.**,  
who have gone before us  
with the sign of faith  
and rest in the sleep of  
peace.

Grant them, O Lord, we pray,  
and all who sleep in Christ,  
a place of refreshment  
(*refrigerium*: “cooling  
refreshment”),  
light and peace.

*Refrigerium* has overtones of  
the cooling of earthly desires  
and upsets. It also was a meal  
eaten in the catacombs.

# The Glory of Heaven

- “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”  
*1 Corinthians 12:13*
- “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” *Rev. 22: 4*
- “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 fulfillment of the deepest human longings.” *Cat 1024*
- The restoration of the communion of Eden.

# The Glory of Heaven

**O what their joy and their glory must be,  
those endless Sabbaths the blessed ones see;  
crown for the valiant, to weary ones rest:  
God shall be All, and in all ever blest.**

**Wish and fulfillment are not severed there,  
nor do things prayed for come short of the prayer.**



# The Glory of Heaven

- Given to those who died in God's grace and friendship, and were perfectly sanctified (made pure from the effects of sin)
- Yet not the fullness that is to come, with Christ's return, the Resurrection, and Last Judgment.
- Jesus Christ, the victorious Lamb, has not yet extended his victory over evil to the point of extinguishing evil; the souls of the martyrs cry out in heaven: "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge the earth?" *Rev. 6:10*

# The Hope of Purgatory

- Does the Church still believe in Purgatory?
- Every time we offer a Mass for an individual or group of people who have died, we are saying that we believe they are in Purgatory, being prepared for Heaven.
- “Poor souls in Purgatory?”
- The souls in Purgatory are saved. They are farther along the road to heaven than any of us are, who are still on our pilgrim way.

# Why Purgatory?

- Only perfect holiness can exist in the presence of God, who is All Holy.
- “For our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin.” *2 Corinthians 6:21*
- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”  
*Jesus on the cross*  
*Matthew 27:46*

# The Hope of Purgatory

“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.”

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1030*

# Pope Benedict on Purgatory

Purgatory is not some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where we are forced to undergo punishment. [Purgatory is the] process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints. [Mercy] does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy.

# Martin Luther on Purgatory

- *From the hymn “Away in a Manger”:*

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay

Close by me forever and love me I pray.

Bless all the dear children in your tender care,

And fit us for heaven to live with you there.

# Prayers for Those in Purgatory

- *The Jewish general Judas Maccabeus, discovering the tokens of idols on some of the bodies of the Jewish soldiers who died in battle, encourages his people to pray and takes up a sin offering:*
- “They turned to prayer, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. [Judas Maccabeus] also took up a collection and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering.”

# Prayers for Those in Purgatory

- “In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead.”
- “Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.”  
*See 2 Maccabees 12:39–45*



# Prayers for Those in Purgatory

- “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1032

# Purgatory: Love Beyond Death

- Christians are summoned by Christ to love one another.
- Purgatory means that, for such love, the limit of death does not exist. The possibility of helping and giving does not cease on the death of a Christian.
- The capacity, and the duty, to love beyond the grave are the true foundation of the belief in Purgatory.

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# Hell

- Self-imposed exclusion from the presence of God.
- Hell is God's ultimate respect for the human will set free by grace.
- The power to have faith is the gift of God.
- Nevertheless the freedom to reject this gift, to choose against God, remains.

# Hell & the Hope of the Church

- “God our Savior desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” *1 Timothy 2:4*

The Church prays over the gifts bread and wine, as they become our offering of Christ’s Body and Blood to the Father:

“Graciously accept this oblation [offering] of our service, that of your whole family; order our days in your peace, **and command that we be delivered from eternal damnation, and counted among the flock of those you have chosen.**” *First Eucharistic Prayer*

# Hell & the Hope of the Church

- “Neither Holy Scripture nor the Church’s Tradition of Faith asserts with certainty of any man that he is actually in Hell.”

*Cardinal Walter Kasper*

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# The Return of Christ

- At the empty tomb, the followers of Jesus likely thought that the end of the world was at hand, signaled by the (general) resurrection of the dead.
- Since that first Easter Day and the Ascension of Christ into glory, the Church has awaited his return.
- The end of history, the day with no earthly tomorrow.



# The Return of Christ

- “Faith in Christ’s return is [also] the certitude that the world will, indeed, come to its perfection, not through rational planning but through that indestructible love which triumphed in the risen Christ. Faith in Christ’s return is faith that, in the end, truth will judge and love will conquer.”

*Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI*

# The Resurrection of the Body, The Fulfillment of Redemption

- “For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air.”

*1 Thessalonians 4:16–17*

- “Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all fall asleep [die] but we will all be changed. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

*1 Corinthians 15:51–52*

# The Resurrection of the Body, The Fulfillment of Redemption

“O God, almighty Father  
our faith professes that your Son died and rose again;  
mercifully grant that through this mystery  
your servant **N.**, who has fallen asleep in Christ,  
may rejoice to rise again through him.”

*Opening Prayer of the Funeral Mass*

*With the new Roman Missal of 1967, the prayers of the Funeral Mass focus on the resurrection from the dead on the Last Day rather than on the immortality of the soul.*

# The Resurrection of the Body, The Fulfillment of Redemption

- *Both a resurrection of the saved in heaven and purgatory, and of the condemned in hell.*
- “The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son’s] voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

*Jesus in John 5:28–29*

# Why is the Resurrection of the Body (of the Dead) Necessary?

- So that, in the General (Last) Judgment, all that God created can be redeemed and brought into the grace of heaven, the fulfillment of redemption.
- “We are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.”  
*1 John 3:2*
- “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the children of God.” *Romans 8:19, 21*

# Why is the Resurrection of the Body (of the Dead) Necessary?

- So that, in the General (Last) Judgment, all that is evil and not of God is cast out of creation forever.
- “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being.

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

*1 Corinthians 15:21, 24–26*

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Creation

# The General (Last) Judgment at the End of Time

- “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. And books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.” *Revelation 20:11–14*



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# The Church in the New Creation

The Pilgrim Church on Earth

The Church in Purgatory

The Church in Glory (Heaven)

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Hell

# Heaven – The Perfecting of Creation

- Heaven comes in two historical stages. The individual's salvation is whole and entire only when the salvation of the cosmos and all the elect has come to full fruition. Being together as the one Christ, they are heaven. In that moment, the whole creation will become song.

*Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI*

# Heaven – The Perfecting of Creation

- **“Then comes the end,** when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.
- When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself also will be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, **so that God may be all in all.**  
*1 Corinthians 15:24, 28*

# Heaven –

## The Perfecting of Creation

- “To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.”  
*Revelation 2:7*
- “To everyone who conquers, I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.”  
*Revelation 2:17*

# Heaven – The Perfecting of Creation

- In this light, one can understand why the New Testament calls heaven not only sheer grace through God's gift of love but also 'reward'. Heaven is 'reward' in that it is a response to this life-way, this biography, this particular person with his actions and experiences. *Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI*

# Heaven – The Perfecting of Creation

- “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: ‘Death will be no more. See, I am making all things new.’” *Rev 21:1, 3, 4, 5*

*Finish, then, Thy new creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be.  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee;  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our  
place,  
Till we cast our crowns before  
Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.  
Charles Wesley*