

Chapter 13: Our Eternal Destiny

“...life is changed, not ended...”

Eschatology – the study of the end times, the “Four Last Things” – death, judgment, Heaven, Hell.

- * “ology” - a discipline of study, as of a certain science (cardiology, dermatology, seismology)
- * Aerology, study of the atmosphere – Areology, study of Mars – Xylology, study of wood – Virology, study of viruses – Epidemiology, study of the origin and spread of diseases

Death is the separation of our eternal soul from our body – the one inevitable event that faces everyone.

- * Natural - “You are going to die.” (Fr. Larry Richards, *Be A Man*)
- * “For to me, life is Christ, and death is gain...” (Philippians 1:20-24)
- * Most people fear it – Jesus Himself, in His humanity, was anxious about His own impending death - “Father, take this cup from me...” (Mark 14:36)
- * Where did it come from? “... through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death...” (Romans 5:12)
- * Remember this is not our home (no reincarnation) - “Just as it is appointed that men die once, and after this the judgment...” (Hebrews 9:27)

The Particular Judgment (one)

The Particular Judgment is made at the moment of our death – at this judgment, the *soul* will either be condemned to Hell, be given a time of purgation, or be rewarded with the blessings of Heaven. It will reveal us for what we are – we will see our lives as God sees them, either of selflessness or self-centeredness.

The General Judgment (all)

The General Judgment is rendered to all by God at the end of time. Our bodies will be raised and united with our souls. God’s saving plan will now be clear to everyone who ever lived – along with the good that we have done or not done – and the results thereof.

- * “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)
- * “Here we note one single thing: men shall be judged according to the way they have treated their fellow men. Indeed, the good and evil they have done to the very least..., they have done to Him. In

some mysterious way, He is present in all, treated rightly in all, maltreated in all.” (Frank Sheed, *To Know Christ Jesus*)

* Matthew 25:31-46 – the “Final Exam”

* Free will - “We have the freedom to interfere in each other’s lives...” Msgr. Ronald Knox, *The Creed in Slow Motion*

Hell

Hell is eternal separation from the sight of God, for whom we were created and for which we long, and thus, it is a great torment. God does not ‘send’ anyone to Hell – remember we have free will. When we use our free will properly, we choose our own eternal destiny. When we choose self over God, we have chosen Hell. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, St. Paul says, “I pummel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.” How can a spiritual giant like Paul fall from God’s grace? Even he cannot be infallibly sure either of his own present state or of his future course.

The Catholic Church does not say if there is anyone in Hell – that is reserved to God (“Judge not, lest ye be judged.” Matt 7:1).

* “Hell is not to love anymore.” George Bernanos

* “Hell is a bad dream from which you never wake.” G.K. Chesterton

Purgatory

The final purification of the elect before the Final Judgment. When we die, we face God’s infinite love. To embrace this, we must let go of all imperfections and selfish hesitations to love God perfectly. We pass through the fire of God’s love. We use images such as fire to try to describe the mystery of these teachings. Purgatory is necessary because as Revelation teaches, nothing unclean can enter Heaven (Rev. 21-27).

* Habakkuk 1:13 - “Too pure are Your eyes to look upon evil...”

* 2 Maccabees 12:39-46 - “a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead”

* Revelation 5:8 - “24 elders...each holding golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints”

* Revelation 8:3-4 – “Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.”

Heaven

Perfect life with the Blessed Trinity and the communion of saints for all eternity – the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme definitive happiness that will fill all human desires. God's Divine Providence will be understood by all.

* "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9)

* Not lying around on clouds strumming harps...

* "Death will be no more; mourning and weeping and pain will be no more..." (Rev. 21:4)

Catholic Funeral Liturgy

Normally there are three separate liturgies for the deceased/family:

No. 1 - The Wake – day before the Funeral Mass, usually a Rosary or Scripture service – this is where eulogies are given. The Wake gives "the village" a chance to see the reality of death and offer sympathies to the family, we come together in the face of loss (grief).

No. 2 - The Funeral Mass – greets the family with the sprinkling of holy water and the placement of the white pall on the casket (thoughts of white garment at Baptism), then the casket moves to the front with the Paschal candle. Preferably the body should be brought to church; however, cremains can be brought to the Mass. The funeral turns our attention from grief to that of the promises of Christ, and we come to see that all is gained in Christ Who is our salvation.

No. 3 - The Graveside – once again the casket is sprinkled with holy water, the blessing of the grave (if not a Catholic cemetery), and prayers asking the Lord to receive the soul of our beloved deceased. This part is about letting go and praying for the eternal peace of our loved ones. The body or cremains are to be placed in consecrated ground/building (not scattered). "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit" - because we are made in the image and likeness of God, consecrated remains go to a consecrated place as a sign of respect,

* "...because man bears in himself the seed of eternity..." (Gaudium et Spes)

Thinking about our own death can help us resolve to live more purposeful and loving lives.

* "Life is given us that we may learn to die well, and we never think of it. To die well, we must live well." (St. John Vianney)

* "Surely we've seen paintings of the cells of monks who kept a human skull on their work tables. We need not go to such lengths as acquiring a skull for our bed stand, but traveling usually goes more smoothly and swiftly when we have a clear idea of our destination." (Scott Hahn, *Signs of Life*)