

The Four Last Things

Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today, and Forever ~

Our gospel this Sunday recounts the story Our Lord tells of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus going to heaven after death, and the rich man who ignored his suffering, going to purgatory. If you attended Mass at Holy Redeemer this Sunday, you will have heard in my homily about the rich man suffering the flames of purgatory not hell. Not hell, because all the people and angels there are filled with hatred of all people and want everyone to join them. The rich man in Our Lord's story does not want his brothers to join him in his suffering, hence a desire for the wellbeing of others. He's not in hell filled with hatred of God and people, but in purgatory suffering for his sins.

Because of the subject matter raised in the above-mentioned gospel, I thought I would speak to **the Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell**. We should have these memorized.

At death everyone faces their individual judgement before Jesus Christ: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Pantheists, Atheists – everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me" – Jesus (Jn. 14:6). So prepare. Fortunately, Jesus is infinitely merciful toward sinners who repent, "I did not come to save the righteous but sinners." He doesn't want to condemn us but to save us. Jesus wants us in heaven with Him, so let's work on that.

At **death**, we are **judged** with infinite perfection by Jesus Christ according to our final state of life on earth. All the good in thought, word, and deed; as well as all the evil in thought, word, and deed. This includes our sins of omission too; what we did not do in thought, word, and deed that God wanted us to do. This judgement takes into account what we would be responsible for knowing and being able to act upon. For example, as a priest, I will be held to a higher standard at my judgement than a person who knows nothing of God. So will almost all of the people who read this pastor's column. The upside of baptism and serving Jesus Christ; is that those who do so, have a greater opportunity for salvation, less purification after death, and a higher place in heaven for eternity. So, let's seek to know, love, and serve the Lord. Let's seek to be holy, the rewards are out of this world!

Hell. Souls who are bound for hell go there immediately after their judgement, and their judgement is a quick one. There is

no appeal, no attempt at one. People who go to hell know they deserve it and agree to belonging there for eternity. They have no remorse, no fear, just unimaginable misery forever. Warning, do not confuse being damned with a lack of mercy on God's part, *or on the part of anyone telling you about it*. God remains infinitely merciful as well as just, for without perfect justice, there can be no perfect mercy.

Heaven is in two states, the beatific vision and purgatory, first the beatific vision. There are those very rare souls who go immediately into the beatific vision of heaven upon their deaths. These are the saints. This is what Our Lord wants all of us to strive for. Even if we should try and fall short, it will still be worth it for all the good we did in this life for God's glory, and the salvation of souls, as well as the lessening of our purification through remorse in purgatory.

Purgatory. The second state of heaven, purgatory (Latin for *purging*), is temporary until passing into the beatific vision forever. It is a state or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. These people suffer purification for what they were responsible for on earth; what evil (even venial) they did in thought, word, and deed; and what they failed to do in thought, word, and deed that God wanted them to do. After these sins have been paid for through the remorse of purgatory (in many cases, very painful and very long) then the Lord lifts them into the beatific vision of heaven. "I tell you solemnly, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny" – Jesus (Mt. 5:26). Here are a couple of great websites on purgatory <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12575a.htm> and www.catholicanswers.org. The Catechism of the Catholic Church does a good job on this subject too.

Limbo. "I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" – Jesus (Jn 3:5). We don't hear much about limbo anymore, and the current catechism doesn't directly address it, yet two ecumenical councils and the Fathers of the Church did. Ecumenical councils are rare gatherings of the Church's bishops. Where they solemnly define a matter of faith, we trust that it is true. The Fathers of the Church are the saints from the first six centuries. Where they taught on a subject with uniformity, we know what they taught was true and remains true for all time. Where they were divided on a teaching, the Church remains uncertain along the lines they were divided on.

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On the issue of salvation for the unbaptized, some Church Fathers taught that people who died without baptism went to hell. Others held that righteous people who died without baptism couldn't go to heaven, yet they also didn't believe that all of them were damned to hell either. Thus, the theory of a state of existence outside of heaven or hell was hypothesized. This state is called limbo.

While this subject is worthy of a pastor's column in itself, for now I'll say that people who die *without baptism*: either go immediately to hell (see above) or into one of the two states of limbo; limbo's purgatory, to be purified of all the same things for the same reasons as those purified in heaven's purgatory; or in extremely rare cases, go directly into limbo's natural state of happiness without further purification. Here are a couple of good articles on limbo – <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/the-need-for-theological-precision-on-limbo> and <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09256a.htm>

So there are two states of eternity all people will ultimately spend eternity in, heaven or hell; but five states that a person can go to immediately after death: the beatific vision of heaven, the purgatory of heaven, limbo in a natural state of happiness, the purgatory of limbo, and hell.

All of this raises some important things for us to consider. The first is the importance of preparing for death. We start with baptism. Jesus (God) commanded us to be baptized, failure to do so has consequences in this life and the next: the loss of the grace of God to lead a holy life, and an increased chance of going to hell, and if not that, then limbo at least until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Then we seek to be holy Christians. Nothing prepares us better in this life for the life to come than baptism and holiness.

The second important take away for us is intercession for the dead. Our prayers and penances for the deceased help them immensely to move on through their purgatory into the beatific vision of heaven. In this regard great graces are released from God for those souls who have a funeral. Catholic funerals are probably the single most efficacious thing we can do for a soul that is in purgatory. So, make sure there is a Catholic funeral for you upon your death and encourage the same for your loved ones. "What you did for the least of these you did for Me" – Jesus – Mt. 25:40.

Purgatory Continued

How does the transformation from sinner on earth to sinless in heaven happen? What happens after our death that removes our sins, makes atonement for them, and eliminates our remorse for our sins?

Over the past 20 years I've read much about purgatory. Three books in particular stand out to me as exceptional, as all three have people on earth either experiencing purgatory through a grace of God, or souls from purgatory reaching out to them. Here they are from beginner to advanced (if you've never read up on purgatory before, do not start with number three). You can do an internet search for them.

1. *The Mist of Mercy* by Anne a Lay Apostle.
2. *Visions of Purgatory*. Anonymous author. Scepter Press.
3. *Get Us Out of Here!!* Maria Simma and Nicky Eltz.

With the assistance of the Church in Heaven (Triumphant) as well as the Church on earth (Militant), let's help all those who are in purgatory (Church Suffering) atone for their sins, glorify God, and move along into the beatific vision of heaven. Know too, that the holy souls in purgatory (holy because they are no longer sinners) can pray for us too, and they appreciate the opportunity to do so. They are not only aware of our prayers and sacrifices for them, but they are also aware of our requests for their help, and their prayers for us are very powerful. There is a caveat though. The holy souls of purgatory have to be asked by name to pray for us and for those for whom we wish them to intercede. So, pray and do penance for your deceased loved ones, and those beyond your family who have no one to intercede for them in death; and ask deceased family members to pray for you or your holy cause.

May the Risen, Ascended, and Glorified Christ Bless You,



Fr. Thomas Nathe