

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, November 16, 2025

Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell - these were the four things in traditionally identified by Church as the Four Last Things. Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. And everybody gets three out of the four. Everyone gets the first two and one of the second two.

In November, we come toward the end of the Church's liturgical year and the Church, especially in the apocalyptic Scriptures that are presented to us in Masses celebrating these days, turns to our attention to these Four Last Things. Not to stir up terror in our hearts, or anxiety, but to present them very much for our consideration. The Church always invites us to live in the present moment as it is in the present where God meets us. We don't want to dwell too much on the past that is already gone - it cannot change. We don't want to dwell too much on the future that isn't in existence yet, worrying and fearing, all of that. We are encouraged to live in the present moment where God meets us. God is not 'The great I was' or 'The great I will be.' He says His name is 'I am.' And yet, even though we live in the present moment, we always have an eye toward the end. We always have an eye toward the future in that sense so that the way we live in the present moment is governed by what we are looking at today. And it seems to me that the way we look at the end and the way we consider the last things has an impact on how we live in the present moment.

There are a lot of people who have different thoughts and ideas about the Last Things. For example, there are those who cannot bring themselves to believe that there is a Hell. Well, what is Jesus thinking about that? It does not seem to be a Scriptural point of view. It seems to go against what Jesus Himself says. So, I don't recommend holding the stance that there is no Hell because if you

look at the teachings of Jesus and the long tradition of His teaching through the Church, you see that there has to be if human beings have free will, for the potential of eternal separation from God.

Another thought is that there is a Hell, but that it is empty because God is too nice to send anyone there. Right? That the goodness and mercy of God override human freedom, so that no matter what we do in this life, God will triumph in the end and bring everyone to Heaven. This is problematic also because it dismisses the reality of human life. And it means that it doesn't matter what we do in this life. It would mean that there is no reason to have faith. There's no reason to strive to do what's good. If the exercise of our free will won't make any difference in the end, then just do whatever they want, because God is so nice. Again, this has not harmonized well with the teachings of Jesus Himself.

A sort of a related perspective on this is that Hell is real but only the very, very worst of the worst could ever go there. So, there is like two souls. Well, again, we know that passage in Scripture where Jesus says, *"The road to destruction is wide, and many find it, but the road to life is narrow and those who find it are a few."* We don't need to give a dogmatic interpretation of that to say that, you know, there's just one little dinner party of eight going on in Heaven and the rest of us are lost. But we should pay close attention to what Jesus says and not just set it aside because we would like to think that you have to be really, really, really bad to be separated from the God for all eternity. It is a choice. It is a human choice. We all know that we are capable of making choices, even bad ones.

Another perspective would be that Hell is certainly real and almost everyone goes there. This is towards the other extreme. That only the very, very best of the best go to Heaven. So, there is hardly a glimmer

of hope for the rest of us. Or there is a perspective that most people go there thankfully, we're not.

The Church warns against the danger of presumption. Just saying, 'Oh, well, got it made.' "It is an easy ride in." But the Church also warns against the opposite extreme, having no hope or having so very, very little hope in Eternal Life. Jesus says, "Do not be terrified." He does not want us to live our life in anxiousness, fear, and terror about Hell or Heaven. In previous generations, and maybe some of you know this, there was generally a much greater fear of Hell. And I would say that in younger generations today, there isn't very much of that fear and perhaps that's because Hell doesn't get preached on all that much. I'm guilty of that perhaps. I mean, it's not on purpose.

It goes from one extreme to the other. Absolute terror of Hell versus no concern whatsoever. So, what is a good and healthy approach to this topic of The Last Four Things? I think we all need to have a good healthy awareness of the recognition of our poverty – that we need God; we need God like crazy; we need God. Absolutely. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot forgive our own sins. We cannot hoist ourselves up to Heaven. We are like little children with respect to God. We need God to lift us up and take us to Himself.

But when we look at our poverty, we should not look at our poverty without hope. "Oh, I am miserable worm. There is just hardly anything good about me." We have such hope in eternal life because in our poverty God loves us. God wants us to be saved. God pours out graces upon us to draw us to Himself. That is our hope. We don't want to feel discouraged because of our poverty and our need. We look at it always with great hope and confidence in the goodness of God. Not falling into presumption, not falling into this white-knuckled terrifying living of life. But honestly acknowledging our

need for God, our poverty, and turning to Him with great hope. I think if we can take that approach and also exercising our free will in such a way to do everything we can to strengthen ourselves in our relationship with God, we might find that we are indeed the on the right path, on the path that leads to eternal life.