

Symbolon Session 10: The Last Things: What Happens After We Die?
Catholic Catechism for Adults Chapter 13: Our Eternal Destiny

Read Mark 13:3-37.

But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35 Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.

The theology which deals with the end of times is called “eschatology,” which is Greek for “study of the end.” Currently we are living in the end of times. These end times, or the final phase of the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation, began when Jesus arose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, with the promise that He would return again

Acts 1:6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samar’ia and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

The age of the Church is an age of waiting and longing for our Lords’ return. All that we do as members of the Church is in preparation for that day, when all the dead will rise, and all people who ever lived will be gathered before our Lord for judgment. In hopes of receiving the reward of eternal life in Heaven with our Lord, we prepare ourselves daily through prayer and works of mercy and charity. Even the liturgy of the Church has an “eschatological” dimension, directing us always toward our fulfillment in Christ. This is especially true of the Mass, of which St. Paul says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Most people are curious about what happens when they die, and also about what will happen at the end of the world. The Church answers these questions with what are called “the Four Last Things.” These four last things are: judgment, purgatory, Heaven, and hell.

All people, at the time of death, receive judgment from God and are assigned either to eternal reward or punishment, based on their conduct while on earth. This is called the “particular” judgment. When Christ returns on the last day, all the world will be judged at once in what is called the “final” judgment. On the day of the final judgment, the bodies of everyone who ever

lived will be raised up, and they will stand before God along with those who are still alive on that day. Those who have lived a life of faith in Christ, having observed His commands and found worthy, will go to Heaven. Those who have lived in sin and have refused to obey Christ will be cast with the devil into eternal hell-fire and punishment.

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

Purgatory is the place most Christian souls go before entering into Heaven. Purgatory is not a place of punishment, but of purification, where souls learn to love God above all else, and to let go of attachments to earthly and/or sinful things. Most Christians die without being holy enough to see God face to face. Purgatory prepares the soul to enter Heaven. The souls in purgatory pray for us, and we can also help them to enter Heaven sooner by our prayers for them, by doing penance for them, and by offering Mass for them. All Souls Day is specifically set aside for this purpose. *Discuss offering Mass for the repose of deceased relatives and friends, practicals of how it's done.*

Heaven is the final destination for Christ's faithful people. Only souls which are completely purified and holy may enter into God's presence. They will see God as he is, face-to-face in Heaven. Heaven is the perfect communion of life and love with the Trinity and all the angels and saints. This perfect communion with God is the fulfillment of every human desire and the state of complete happiness.

Hell is the final destination for those who stubbornly reject the grace of Christ and persist in their sins, refusing to repent. Because they have chosen to leave God out of their lives, they are eternally separated from Him. These people suffer eternally with the devil in the fires of hell. We do not pray for them, because our prayers cannot help them. They can never be released from their torment, because they chose sin over God. Read Revelation 21:1-8 and 22:6-21.

Questions to discuss that students may have:

Start with:

Do Catholics believe in the rapture?

<https://www.aggiecatholic.org/blog/2011/05/the-rapture-and-the-catholic-church>

Does the Church teach that only Catholics can be saved and go to heaven?

<https://www.catholic.com/qa/did-a-statement-by-john-paul-ii-mean-that-only-catholics-can-be-saved>

What is the one unforgivable sin?

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/unforgivable-sin-1164>