



SESSION OBJECTIVES

This session is presented in three parts: communion in holiness and sin's solution; our death and resurrection; and eternal splendor or everlasting horror. After this session you should ...

- Be familiar with the last four articles of the Creed, which include the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of the body.
- Understand the significance of these articles in the Christian life.
- Understand how the "Four Last Things" (death, judgment, heaven, and hell) are best understood in relation to eternal life with God, which is the fulfillment of a life lived for him on earth.
- Understand that this eternal life includes both those who diligently follow Christ as well as those who, through no fault of their own, seek to please God with their lives without ever understanding the necessity of embracing Christ and his Church.

GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

Having considered the four marks of the Church, we now turn to the last four affirmations in the Apostles' Creed, which, though brief, bear the whole weight of eternity: "I believe [in] ... the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Under the last article, "life everlasting;" the *Catechism* considers the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

This final section is very rich, and many of the themes we have already examined find their full expression here at the end of the Creed. The *Catechism* will return to the biblical basis for its structure, Acts 2:42, and its description of the ancient Church's shared goods, the "apostles' teaching and fellowship ... the breaking of bread and the prayers" (the four "pillar" divisions of the *Catechism*).

Here it will describe in greater detail the membership of the Church, the saints who share communion "in holy things" in their three states: those still on earth (the pilgrim Church or the Church militant),

those undergoing purification in purgatory (the Church suffering), and those already enjoying the glory of heaven (the Church triumphant). In its treatment of the communion of saints, the *Catechism* discusses Mary's preeminent position among the saints in her triple role as daughter of the Father, spouse of the Spirit, and mother of the Son. It also describes appropriate devotion to her.

The forgiveness of sins is addressed in more detail in the second pillar of the Catechism, which deals with the sacraments, but since the Creed includes this great gift in its statement of belief, the Catechism takes it up here too. It connects this great gift of forgiveness with our faith in the Holy Spirit because of the Spirit's role in making Christ's saving work available to us. The forgiveness of sins is also associated with the communion of saints because it is through the Church that we receive the gift of forgiveness.

Since forgiveness of sins is necessary for eternal life, this section also serves to introduce the Catechism's discussion on everlasting life, but not before stating our belief in the resurrection of the body.



Last Judgment, by Michelangelo Buonarroti

Not only will our sins be forgiven, but on the last day, our bodies will be raised. In this section, the Catechism stresses the dignity of our bodies-along with all of matter, time, and history-and of our participation in Christ's resurrection, finishing with an important reflection on death (the "four last things").

The first pillar of the Catechism ends, ironically, with the "endlessness" of human life. Though we have a beginning, we have no end. Upon our death, we will all face a judgment that will make clear to us the eternal destiny for which our life as prepared us, eternity with God in heaven, or an eternity separated

from him in hell. Happiness, or blessedness, which has been the goal for us from the start, is not surprisingly the defining difference between those two eternal states. We will see that heaven is "definitive happiness" and hell is a "self-exclusion" from that happiness.

The last five paragraphs offer a beautiful reflection on the Amen of the Creed. We will find that, in keeping with the theme of this course ("from Blessing to Blessing"), the Creed, like the whole of the Christian journey, ends where it began. Our Amen repeats and confirms its first words: "I believe" (No. 1064).

Eschatology-How Studying It Can Lead to Hope

Eschatology is a branch of theology that is the study of the doctrine of the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. (*Eschata* in Greek means "outcome" or "end.") Some theologians consider the field a reflection on the deposit of hope, and a deep examination of the last sentence of the Nicene Creed: "... I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to *come*:'

Pope Benedict XVI, a theology professor of renown prior to his pontificate, taught widely on the subject. He writes in his book *Eschatology*: "Attitudes toward dying determine attitudes to living. Death becomes the key to the question: What really *is* man? The mounting callousness towards human life which we are experiencing today is intimately bound up with the refusal to confront the question of death:' And this: "The starting point of the Christian understanding of immortality is the concept of God:'

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

In your prayer time this week, consider the verses in Revelation 21, which is the Scripture reading assignment for this lesson.

MYTH BUSTER

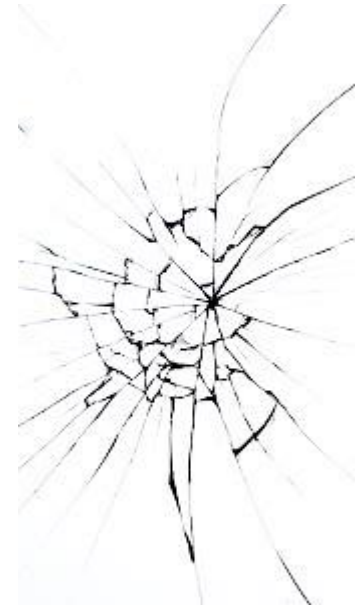
Myth: There is no such thing as hell.

To some, hell simply doesn't exist. Others speculate that hell exists, but argue about who actually inhabits it. These arguments from, "No one really ends up in hell, thanks to the mercy of God" to "Many will be in hell, thanks to the justice of God:"

Remember childhood squabbles when someone would yell, "Oh *yeahhhh?* Who died and left *you* boss?" Well, here's the answer when it comes to Church teaching: Jesus Christ died and rose, and left the Church to be "boss:' The Church operates with Christ's authority. Ignoring the truth about hell, one has to rail against the authority of the Church. (For more on Church authority, see Nos. 85, 119, 553, 874, 895, 918, and 1023.) As the *Catechism* explicitly states, "The Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity" (No. 1035).

In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Blessed John Paul II wrote: "Is not hell ... the ultimate safeguard of man's moral conscience?"

The *Catechism* assures us that "God predestines no one to go to hell" (No. 1037). Even the most "hell-bent" person has hope of a final conversion. For God desires that all should come into blessed communion with him (see No. 1).



GLOSSARY TERMS

Amen

This traditional ending to Christian prayer is derived from a Hebrew root that can mean "so be it:" "I believe:" or simply "truth:" The very last paragraph of the *Catechism* associates this term with Mary's *fiat* (see No. 2865), the Latin word that appears first in her response to the angel Gabriel when he announced her role in the Incarnation: "*Let it be [done] to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38).

Beatific Vision

The term used to explain the unmediated experience of God that the blessed in heaven enjoy for all eternity. This experience, which "no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Corinthians 2:9), is entirely God's gift to those who have believed, loved, and served him in this life.

Church Militant/Pilgrim Church

The Church militant is that part of the communion of saints which is still on earth, undergoing the period of trial that is human life. With those being purified in purgatory and those fully incorporated into the joys of heaven, they form one Church.

Church Suffering

The Church suffering is that part of the communion of saints which is being purified from imperfections left by sin (Revelation 21:27) and made holy enough to enter heaven. "Purgatory" is the name given to this state of those who, having died in a state of grace, are not yet wholly perfect. St. Paul refers to this state in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, when he describes the person who builds on the foundation of Christ, but imperfectly, who "will be saved, but only as through fire:"

Church Triumphant

The Church triumphant is that part of the communion of saints which is already enjoying the beatific vision in heaven.

Communion of Saints

The communion of saints in which we profess to believe each time we

I. "The Communion of Saints" (see No. 946)

A. Holy things (*sancta*) and holy persons (*sancti*) (see No. 948)

1. Holy persons include the saints and angels
2. Communion in Spiritual Goods (see No. 949)
 - a. "apostles' teaching" - The Creed
 - b. "breaking of the bread" - Sacraments
 - c. "fellowship" - The Moral Life
 - d. "prayers" - Prayer
3. These holy things include the charisms and gifts of the Spirit (see No. 951)
4. "*Communion in charity*" (No. 953)

B. The three states of the Church (see Nos. 954-955)

1. The Church militant (on earth)
2. The Church suffering (in purgatory)
3. The Church triumphant (in heaven)

C. "Mary-Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church" (see No. 963)

1. Mary's bodily assumption is "... an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians ..." (No. 966)
2. "Mary-Eschatological Icon of the Church" (see No. 972)
3. We offer honor (*dulia*) to the saints; we worship (*latria*) God alone

II. The Forgiveness of Sins (see Nos. 976-983)

A. Two sacramental means of forgiveness

1. Baptism
2. Reconciliation (Penance)

B. "The Power of the Keys" (see Nos. 981-983)

1. Given by Christ to St. Peter and, by extension, to the apostles
2. A gift of mercy

III. The Resurrection of the Body (see Nos. 988-1019)

A. Christ's resurrection anticipates what we will experience

1. Disciples are allowed to touch the risen Christ
2. Christ's risen body is entirely subject to his will
3. Four qualities of the glorified body (a "return to the Garden")
 - a. Impassability - freedom from pain and suffering
 - b. Immortality - freedom from death
 - c. Subtlety - body entirely subject to the soul
 - d. Clarity (brightness) - the beauty of the soul will shine through

B. On Human Death

1. Separation of the soul from the body (see No. 997)
2. All will rise on the last day to face the final judgment (see Nos. 998)
3. "Christ 'will change our lowly body ...' into a 'spiritual body'"² (No. 999)
4. "*Death is transformed by Christ ... into a blessing*"³ (No. 1009)
5. In baptism, we die and are risen with Christ (see No. 1010)
6. "The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death" (No. 1014)

IV. The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell

A. "The Particular Judgment" (see Nos. 1021-1022)

1. Judgment of the individual immediately after death-a "finding" of the facts
2. Once the human soul leaves the body, it must go to the place where it belongs

B. Heaven (see Nos. 1023-1029)

1. "The state of supreme, definitive happiness" (No. 1024)
2. A "blessed communion" (No. 1027)
3. "The beatific vision" (No. 1028)

C. Purgatory (see Nos. 1030-1032)

1. State of final purification for those who die in God's grace
2. New Testament allusions to purgatory (Luke 12:58; Matthew 12:32; 1 Corinthians 3:15)
3. Holy souls in purgatory yearn for heaven

D. Hell

1. "[The] state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed ..." (No. 1033)
2. A mercy for the damned: they could not stand to live in the presence of God's love
3. "The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God" (No. 1035)

E. The Last Judgment (see Nos. 1038-1041)

1. "Only the Father knows the day and the hour" (No. 1040)
2. "... Jesus Christ ... will pronounce the final word on all history" (No. 1040)
3. "We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation ..." (No. 1040)

F. "Amen" (see Nos. 1061-1065)

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund"¹ (No. 947). How is this lived out, practically speaking, in the Christian life- particularly through participation in the sacraments, in the liturgy, and in prayer?
2. The intercession of the saints is described in No. 956. Have you been blessed by a particular saint's intercession, or do you have a devotion to a particular saint? If so, why? What does your devotion include?
3. Some suggest that devotion to Mary and the saints takes away from our relationship with Jesus. In light of No. 970, how might you explain devotion to the saints to someone who feels that way?
4. The *Catechism* speaks about "the power of the keys"² (No. 981), a reference to Matthew 16:19, in which Jesus promises Peter the "keys to the kingdom." Why is the forgiveness of sins associated with the keys, and why is the power of the keys so significant? Can you describe how you have benefited from the "keys?"
5. Our expectation of the resurrection of the body demands that we treat the body with respect (see No. 1004). This expectation informs the Church's position on Christian burial and cremation (see No. 2301). In what ways is this respect for the body violated in today's culture, and what might you do to increase respect for the body?
6. The *Catechism* describes purgatory and the scriptural basis for this teaching (see Nos. 1030-1032). How is purgatory a sign of God's mercy?
7. The *Catechism* affirms the existence of hell and also affirms that God predestines no one to go there. Those who enter hell prefer separation from God to communion with him, and yet many wonder why anyone would choose to go to hell. Can you identify specific choices that people regularly make that indicate their preference for separation from God rather than communion with him? Why does a loving God allow people to go to hell?
8. The *Catechism* distinguishes between the particular judgment and the Last Judgment (see Nos. 1022, 1038). Can you explain the difference between the two? What do you understand the terms of the judgment will be? Are you ready for it?

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank you for the blessing revealed to us in the Creed. We ask your grace for the way ahead that we might enter into the joy of the blessed. To that end, grant us the presence and prayers of the communion of saints as we join our voices with theirs in saying: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

HOMEWOR QUESTIONS

Name _____

From the *Catechism* Nos. 946-987

1. To what two aspects of the communion of saints do the Latin terms *sancta* and *sanctifier*?

2. What are the three states of the Church (or the states in which people in the Church are found)?

3. What role does Mary play for us as a result of the wholly singular way in which she cooperated in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls?

4. Who has received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to archangels?

From the *Catechism* Nos. 355-384

5. Of what is the human individual capable as a result of being in the image of God?

6. What "... innermost aspect of man ..." most clearly expresses God's image in us?

7. If Adam and Eve had not sinned and had "remained in the divine intimacy;" they would not have had to _____

From the *Catechism* Nos. 988-1019

8. On what point does St. Augustine suggest that the Christian Faith encounters the most opposition?

9. What gives us a foretaste of Christ's transfiguration of our bodies?

10. What entered the world on account of man's sin and was thus contrary to the plan of God?

From the *Catechism* Nos. 1020-1065

11. What is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness?

12. What is the difference between the particular judgment and the Last Judgment?

13. What is the chief punishment of hell?

14. What will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all?

15. In addition to our bodies, what else will be transformed at the end of time?

16. What word repeats and confirms the first words of the Creed, "I believe"?
