The Four Last Things
Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell



Death

- Physical death of the body is certain and occurs once.

Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage . . . When "the single course of our earthly life" is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: "It is appointed for men to die once." There is no "reincarnation" after death. (CCC 1013)

- And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb 9:27).
- I want to see God, and in order to see him, I must die. (St. Teresa of Avila, *Life,* Chapter 1)
- "I am not dying, I am entering life." (St. Therese of Lisieux, *The Last Conversations*)

Judgment

Particular (Individual) Judgment

The Catholic doctrine of the particular judgment is this: that immediately after death the eternal destiny of each separated soul is decided by the just judgment of God. This doctrine is not explicitly taught in Scripture but it is implicitly taught.

- St. Paul (II Corinthians 5) longs to be absent from the body that he may be present to the Lord, evidently understanding death to be the entrance into his reward.
- "This day you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).
- Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God (Rev 20:4)

- As the earliest Acts of the Martyrs and Liturgies attest, the martyrs were persuaded of the prompt reward of their devotion. This belief is also evidenced by the ancient practice of honoring and invoking the saints.
- Second Council of Lyons (1274) declared that souls free from sin are at once received into heaven.
- Theologians suppose that the particular judgment will be instantaneous. At the moment of death the separated soul is internally illuminated as to its own guilt or innocence and of its own initiation takes its course either to hell, or to purgatory, or to heaven

General (Universal) Judgement

- The General Judgement will occur at the Second Coming of Christ when he "comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead." (Nicene Creed) This judgement is the time when Christ will gather all of creation and publicly pass judgement upon it. It is a universal world judgement on those still living on earth.
- The General Judgement is also known by the following names in the Scriptures: Parousia, Day of the Lord, Epiphaneia, or Appearance.

When will it occur?

As to the time, "It is not for you to know the times or moments. . . " Scripture tells us, but to always be ready because "the Day" will come "as a thief" in the night (Mt 24:42-44)

Where will it occur?

All the texts in which mention is made of the Parousia, or Second Coming, seem to imply clearly enough that the general judgment will take place on the earth.

How will it occur?

At the Second Coming, Christ will appear in the heavens, seated on a cloud and surrounded by the angelic hosts (Matthew 16:27; 24:30; 25:31). The angels will minister to the Judge by bringing all before Him (Matthew 24:31).

Who will be judged?

All humanity, both good and bad, will appear in the judgment to give an account of their deeds. The angels and the demons will not be judged directly, since their eternal destiny has already been fixed.

What will be judged?

The judgment will include all works, good or bad, forgiven as well as unforgiven sins, every idle word (Matthew 12:36), every secret thought (1 Corinthians 4:5).

SIGNS THAT ARE TO PRECEDE THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

1. *General Preaching of the Christian Faith*. Concerning this sign the Savior says: "And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

2. *Conversion of the Jews*. According to the interpretation of the Fathers, the conversion of the Jews towards the end of the world is foretold by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (11:25-26): "For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, . . . that blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. And so all Israel should be saved as it is written: There shall come out of Sion, he that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob".

3. *Return of Enoch and Elijah*. The belief that these two men, who have never tasted death, are reserved for the last days to be precursors of the Second Coming was practically unanimous among the Church Fathers (Concerning Elijah - Malachi 4:5-6; Enoch see Ecclesiasticus 44:16.)

4. *A Great Apostasy*. As to this event St. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:3) that they must not be terrified, as if the day of the Lord were at hand, for there must first come a revolt (the apostasia).
5. *The Reign of Antichrist*. In the passage (2 Thessalonians 2:3 ff.) St. Paul indicates as another sign of the day of the Lord, the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. "The man of sin" here described is generally identified with the Antichrist, who St. John says is to come in the last days (1 John 2:18).
6. *Extraordinary Calamities in Nature*. The Scriptures clearly indicate that the judgment will be preceded by terrifying disturbances of the physical universe (Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25-26).
7. *The Universal Fire*. In the Apostolic writings we are told that the end of the world will be brought about through a general destruction by fire, which, however, will not annihilate the present creation, but will change its form and appearance (2 Peter 3:10-13; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Rev 3:3, and 16:15).
8. *The Trumpet of Resurrection*. Several texts in the New Testament make mention of a voice or trumpet which will awaken the dead to resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; John 5:28).
9. *"The Sign of the Son of Man Appearing in the Heavens."* In Matthew 24:30, this is indicated as the sign immediately preceding the appearance of Christ to judge the world. By this sign the Fathers of the Church generally understand the appearance in the sky of a Cross of some sort.

Heaven

Heaven is known as the place where God and His angels reside. They are constantly with God and see His face. With God in heaven are likewise the souls of the just (II Cor. 5:1; Matt., v, 3, 12). Thus the term *heaven* has come to designate both the happiness and the home of the just in the next life.

Heaven and the Beatific Vision

- In heaven the just will see God by direct intuition, clearly and distinctly. Here on earth we have no immediate perception of God; we see Him but indirectly in the mirror of creation. Scripture tells us that we will see God face to face and we will see Him as he is. This was defined by Pope Benedict XII in 1336 as a dogma of the Church.

- In order to see God, the human intellect of the blessed is supernaturally perfected by the gift of glory. This "light of glory" is infused and allows the souls in glory to see God with their intellect, just as material light enables our bodily eyes to see material objects.

- God will be the primary object of our beatific vision. The other things (secondary) that we will be aware of are things like the other blessed souls in heaven, those on earth, and the reasonable things we were interested in knowing while on earth.

- Although the blessed see God, they will not be able to comprehend Him, because God is absolutely incomprehensible to the created intellect. We cannot by a single act of our intellect represent every possible creature individually, clearly, and distinctly, as God does; such an act would be infinite, and an infinite act is incompatible with the nature of a created and finite intellect.

Supernatural Character of Heaven

- The happiness of the blessed in heaven is everlasting. (Mt 25:45-46)
- The souls in heaven will still have free will but will not sin. All the happiness that we seek will be perfectly fulfilled in heaven and the perfect Good will satisfy our desire for happiness. This perfect Good is God himself.
- In heaven there is not the least pain or sadness; for every natural desire will be finally realized. The will of the blessed is in perfect harmony with the Divine will; they feel displeasure at the sins of men, but without experiencing any real pain.
- They delight greatly in the company of Christ, the angels, and the saints, and in the reunion with so many who were dear to them on earth.
- After the resurrection the union of the soul with the glorified body will be a special source of joy for the blessed.
- There will be various degrees of beatitude corresponding to the various degrees of merit.

Hell

Hell is the place of punishment for the wicked and unrighteous after death. Those who die in mortal sin will definitely be consigned to hell.

In Scripture, hell is also called the following:
Gehenna, "place of torments" (Luke16:28), "pool of fire" (Rev 14: 20 and elsewhere), "furnace of fire" (Mat 8:42, 50), "unquenchable fire" (Mat 3, 12, and elsewhere), "everlasting fire" (Mat 18:8; 25:41; Jude,7)

Hell is Eternal

The Holy Bible is quite explicit in teaching the eternity of the pains of hell. The torments of the damned shall last forever and ever (Rev 14:11; 19:3; 20:10). They are everlasting just as are the joys of heaven (Mat 25:46).

Note:
* God is not only infinitely good, He is infinitely wise, just, and holy.
* No one is cast into hell unless he has fully and entirely deserved it.

- The damned will feel a pain of loss
  The loss of heaven, hope and faith.

- The damned will feel a pain of sense
  Punishment will be real and in some sort, felt.

Purgatory

Purgatory (Lat., "purgare", to make clean, to purify) in accordance with Catholic teaching is a 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 persons can be helped through the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the offering of Masses for them.

Temporal punishment is due to sin, even after the sin itself has been pardoned by God, is clearly the teaching of Scripture. In the New Testament as well as in the Old, almsgiving and fasting, and in general penitential acts are the real fruits of repentance (***Mt 3:8; Mt 5:25-26; 2Sam 12:13-14***).

Both Scripture and Tradition testify to the existence of a place that is not Heaven nor Hell, but a place of purification that the Catholic Church calls Purgatory.

The practice of praying for the dead (*2 Macc 12:38-45*),

We can see in the quote below that the 2nd book of Maccabees states that offering up prayers for the dead was "a holy and pious thought." These fallen warriors had sinned by carrying an amulet on their person, but vs. 45 tells us that they were still to receive a "splendid reward" because they died in "godliness." Judas Maccabeus takes up a collection to have a "sin offering" done on their behalf. The offering was an "atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sin."

The Christian equivalent is the offering of the body and blood of Christ to the Father for the "atonement for the dead." We do this most perfectly in the Mass.

Prayers for Those Killed in Battle

38 Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and they kept the sabbath there.
39 On the next day, as by that time it had become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kinsmen in the sepulchres of their fathers.
40 Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen.
41 So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous Judge, who reveals the things that are hidden;
42 and they turned to prayer, begging that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out. And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen.
43 He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection.
44 For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead.

45 But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.*[1]

Purification of the saved (*1 Cor 3:15*)

The Catholic Church has an ancient tradition of praying for the dead. If the dead are in heaven, they have no need of our prayers. If they are in hell, our prayers cannot help them. They must, then, be in a place where our prayers will benefit them.

- The Apostolic practice of praying for the dead which passed into the liturgy of the Church, is as clear in the fourth century as it is in the twentieth. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechet. Mystog., V, 9, P.G., XXXIII, col. 1116)

In ***1 Cor 3:12-15*** we see that our works, referred to as "building with gold, silver, wood or hay," are going to be tested by fire on the "Day," which is our judgment day. This "fire" is what the Catholic Church refers to as the "purification fires of Purgatory," like gold is purified with fire. These fires will "test" our works and if they are built upon with "wood, hay or straw," they will burn up and there will be a "suffering" associated with that purification process, BUT "he himself will be saved."
The Catholic Church teaches that everyone in Purgatory is destined for heaven, and it is **not** a "second chance" to avoid hell.

11 ¶ For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
12 Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—
13 ¶ each man's work will become manifest; for the Day† will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.
14 If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.
15 ¶ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. [2]

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* 12:45: Vulgate has (verses 45–46): "[45] And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid up for them. [46] It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."
[1] *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 2 Mac 12:38–45.
¶ **3:11:** Eph 2:20.
¶ **3:13:** 2 Thess 1:7–10.
† 3:13, *the Day*: i.e., the day of the Lord, God's searching judgment.
¶ **3:15:** Job 23:10.
[2] *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 1 Co 3:11–15.