

By Mary Ann Horton (RCIA Class Dec 20, 2016)

We are going to talk about Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. The Four Last Things.

We face the reality of death every day. Death is the inescapable thing. None of us will escape death. It is the universal consequence of sin.

Let's start with **Wisdom Chapter 2:21** (p682?) talking about evildoers - "These were their thoughts, but they erred for their wickedness blinded them.... for God formed man to be imperishable ...but by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it."

One of the only places in Sacred Scripture where it says straightforwardly that death was not part of the plan. That death was brought by the chain of events begun by a fallen angel, and allowed to continue by our own free choice - in the garden - at the beginning. Death was never meant to be. You think it's hard to imagine a world like that. But remember, you take it for granted that heaven will be that way. Heaven will be a place of imperishability.

God wills all to be saved. He wills none to be damned. He creates none to be damned. But the time for accepting or rejecting God, ends at death. The reality of judgment then, calls everyone to conversion, because it's a real thing. And that's what we are going to build from. Death, Judgment, Heaven, or Hell.

So death, we just read from Wisdom 2. Mother Theresa has presided over many, many deaths. She believed everyone should have the dignity of having an attended death. One of the people under her care said "I have lived like a dog, but I will die like a angel." She described death as our most important moment, because it is the moment you live for. You live to be able to make the right movement of your will at death; the right desire at your death. It is not a given that you will. And it is freely your choice. Angels don't get that paradigm of time and repentance. They operate from eternity directly, so their first choice is their final choice. Their first choice is their eternal choice. In our case, our last choice is our eternal choice. It is the moment at which we are permitted to make a choice that will set us for eternity. Therefore, if it's that important, which it is, it could easily be described as Mother said, as "our most important moment."

As we talked about, death is a consequence of sin. It was not meant to be. The separation we feel, is because it's an unnatural thing. It is an unnatural breaking of your nature. It is important to define death properly. Death is not a dormancy. There are thousands of bodies in the cemetery, but there are no souls there. The soul at the moment of death does not enter a state of dormancy. There are moments when you can tell that your body and your soul are on different tracks. The fact of dreaming, you can see clearly that there is a part of you that does not need

rest. Your body does need rest. You'll kill yourself if you are forced to stay awake. It's a form of torture.

But you notice, as evidenced by your dreams, there is a part of you that does not need rest. Your soul - When you die, your soul breaks from its nature, its human body. That is unnatural. It was never meant to happen. You are a body and soul composite. Angels do not have a body. They are spirits alone. Our bodies give us a uniqueness in creation. It's not a suit we are zipped up in. What makes us human is that we are soul and body together. We are designed to experience things soul and body together. It is unnatural to break it. It is the case that you get your body back at the final judgment. You might think, I don't want my body back. But remember when you get your body back, it is a glorified body. All that is possible in your soul in experiencing God in heaven, your body will match it. One way to phrase it, it will not be a restriction on your relationship with God. It is native to what you are. In other words, you won't be as happy as you could be, without your body in eternity.

Death - once it enters in - what is it? Death is not supposed to happen. God did not author His world as a world of death. It is a consequence of sin. As St. Paul says, the "worst sting of sin, is death." It was never supposed to happen. But what is it? Death is not a dormancy; it is an unnatural breaking of your nature. It breaks what was never meant to be separated -your body from your soul. Your body and your soul were never meant to be apart. In heaven, they won't be. In hell, they won't be. That fact means that it is a strange thing. It should never feel normal. In a secular sense, we talk about a natural death, meaning not a murder or accident. But in a spiritual sense, there is no such thing as a natural death. It is unnatural. It is not how nature was designed, and it is not how nature will persist throughout eternity. That's an odd thing to think about. We just don't hear it phrased that way, but it is basic to Christian theology.

The curse of death has been transformed into a blessing by Christ. Are we actually saying that death is a blessing? Remember when we talked about whatever Jesus enters into, He redeems. Poverty?, the womb?, making motherhood the highest example of holiness; suffering?, to refine us, to make us holier. He entered death. He made it what it wasn't before. We don't realize what is was before. For the Jews, death was not a blessing. They did not understand it that way. And for the secular world, agnostics, or atheists, death is not a blessing because it ends "what there is," in their point of view. And for other religions, death could be something simply that they consider undoable. The idea of reincarnation; that death is simply the door to the next thing on earth. Unfortunately, some people view reincarnation, or the idea of it, as a good thing. The religion that started the idea does not consider it a blessing. Funny that no one ever says they were a street sweeper in ancient Egypt. They were always royalty. It's not a good thing to be reincarnated. The idea is to get out of the cycle of reincarnation.

Death is the entrance into ever-lasting life; no reincarnation - no second chances. This is what you get; the life you have now, the soul, the body you have now, the age, the era you have now, is what there is. And that's enough. How is it a blessing then? The idea of an after-life wasn't

settled before. It was a question for the Jews - is there an after-life? It wasn't settled in Jewish theology. In Christian life, we take it for granted - this idea of an after-life. If your theology is based on the idea that there's no after-life, it is a wonderful thing to believe in, and to know is true, that because Jesus entered into death, He made it simply a gate.

It wasn't anymore a curse for those who follow Him. He made it the only way to Him. He made death from the worst curse of sin into the ONLY way to Him, to eternal blessedness. It was not that. It became that; by His entering into it, He made it the gate. The last point here, and very wonderful, is the Church helps greatly with death. As Paul says, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." One of the handouts is on the Catholic Funeral - the Church sees it as really important to prepare for your death; and helps us tremendously with that process. There are even prayers for preparation for a happy death. What is a happy death? What the Church means by a happy death, is a death attended by the things of God. Attended by the sacraments of the church, the prayers of the faithful, the care of fellow Christians. A happy death, a death you're prepared for. Not everyone experiences that - what we call a happy death. If there's a sudden death, there's no time. What we pray for - A happy death is attended and well-prepared for. There's even a patron saint for it - St. Joseph. Why St. Joseph? Tradition tells us that he passed away prior to the bulk of Jesus' mission, and prior to his wife, Mary. He died, and who attended his death? Jesus and Mary. That's a happy death. To have your deathbed attended by the Blessed Mother and Jesus Christ. That's why he's the Patron of a happy death. We pray for that. We intercede for that. There's a book by Alphonse Ligouri entitled Preparation for Death. And you might think that's kind of morbid. But not if it's your most important moment. That's our business to prepare, even if its sudden, to be prepared to go, to prepare for a happy death. Pope John the 23rd, Good Pope John, died in 1963. He was only pope for about 5 years. He was diagnosed with cancer. Beloved by many people, rotund sorta guy, Friar Tuck kind of happy, go-lucky kind of pope. When the doctor told him he had cancer, he said "Meh. I always keep my bags packed."

### Particular Judgment

So now you die - your nature shatters. What is it going to be like to be judged? What do you imagine it will be like? Do you think it will be a long conversation? Are you reminding God of all those good things you did? All those puppies you took care of? In Revelation "we will be judged on our good deeds". It needs to be understood properly. There's nothing we can do to earn heaven. Nothing we can do on our own to cross that chasm caused by sin. It's not our bridge to cross, it's Christ's. It has to be understood in the right context.

Is there going to be much of a conversation in your particular judgment? Probably not. We face Christ at the moment of death. He is the measuring rod. Not the balance scales of our good and bad, as we often think. The final exam for heaven is Matthew 25. What are the terms of the judgment? What are His terms? On what will we be judged? [Matthew 25:31](#) (1054?) Judgment of the Nations, Jesus is speaking of Himself, "When the son of man comes in his glory and all

the angels with him, he ...sheep and the goats ...The king will say to those on his right. ...Come to my kingdom... Amen I say to you... whatever you did for the least brothers of mine you did for me."

Mother Theresa called this the Gospel in 5 words. It was her favorite verse in the Bible. She of course took it very seriously. The way of loving Jesus was to love these least ones. The Gospel in five words is "You did it to me". The bottom line is ... loving the least ones is serving Him. The greatest commandment is to love God with your whole heart, mind and soul; and the second is like it - to love your neighbor as yourself. These 5 words, "You did it to Me." are these two commandments made one. He's saying loving your neighbor is loving Me.

Then onto Verse 41 "depart from me you accursed... you did not care for me.... what you did not do for one of these least ones ....eternal life." You have just read the final exam for heaven. St. John of the Cross said it this way - he summarized the whole passage very simply. "At the evening of our life we will be judged on our love." That is not to say that we earn it. Remember the measuring rod is Christ. A lot of people miss that point. Most people say "I'm pretty sure God will be nice to me, I'm not as bad as Hitler. I'm a good person." The idea that judgment is based on the average; the middle ground; "I'm only human." But those were never the terms of the judgment. The measuring rod is not average, or Hitler. The measuring rod is Christ. In that measurement we all fall short. It's not a matter of measuring *up*. It's a matter of surrendering to what He can do living through you, which will exceed "I'm only human." Because in His grace you are not only human. You get God's grace, gifts, and that makes possible what isn't possible.... it's all grace. We don't earn it. It won't be much of a conversation.

You think He knows my life, but the thing is, you don't know your life. Your memory is faulty. Can you remember what you did at 8? Your past is not crystal clear to you. Neither is your future. The other trump is your future. What are you going to do that is going to impact eternity? What are you going to do that will stand forward in time? Good or bad? There isn't a forward at the time of your death; there's only a past, you think. But that's not so. This is the most challenging thing. CCC 1039 says an astounding thing - in the presence of Christ who is truth itself - all is laid bare. The truth of each one's relationship with God will be laid bare. The last judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life." When you die, everything you've done is all in your past. The terms of your judgment, that you're totally unaware of at your death are the furthest consequences of the things you did or failed to do. The terms of your judgment are not simply the past. When you cross the threshold of death, certain things will be made clear to you. Your memory will clear up. You are aware - sharply aware of all of your past sinfulness. For the first time, you are outside the paradigm of temptation or distraction. At your judgment, you are undistract-able. You are singularly focused. Your past is crystal clear. And so, for the very first time, is your future. Remember, eternity is not an infinite number of years. Eternity is all time present.

Your body will not be there. You will be there with the Lord with that clarity. You will *know* where you belong. You will know whether you belong in His arms or away from them. You will know where you belong. The terms of the judgment will be crystal clear to you - what the state of your soul is before Him. It will not be a question.

You will, God-willing and with hope, you will not need to have a balance sheet laid out. The terms of the judgment were never us earning it anyway. The terms are surrendering to Him and trusting Him because we can't earn it. I am a beggar prostrate before Him. Have mercy on me Lord, a sinner. And If that is where your heart is, all that remains in your judgment, is to fly into His arms.

### General Judgment

For the rest of the world there is General Judgment. Particular judgment occurs at the moment of your individual death. There is clearly in scripture the sense of a General judgment which occurs at the end of time; when the battle with Satan is over; when the whole game is up. You are not re-judged - thanks be to God - It is a judgment over all that has transpired over the course of the battle.

"Every knee will bow; every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." At the General Judgment, even the knees of the damned will bend to the Lord, because they know that He is the Lord. The demons believe and tremble, they don't love Him, but they do believe and tremble. Because in the ultimate reality, Jesus Christ *is* Lord. Nothing will be complete until he comes again. "Every knee will bow. The dead will rise." Bodies will be reunited with souls. At your death, you are judged, but not reunited with your body until the general judgment. It is true that love is stronger than death. At the General Judgment, the Church will come into its fullness with all creation. The universe will be renewed - there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

What will heaven need to have with your body in it? Heaven *will be* physical. Bodies will occupy it. God's got one. He did not unzip the human suit and split. He ascended to the Father *in* His body. Jesus ascended in his body. The Second Person of the Trinity retains His human body, so that He may be in intimate fellowship with you. It makes it more wonderful, than all He did in His body in His time on earth. He will remain in a human body so as to love us as a human gets loved. You will embrace God. He will hold you, as his earthly mother held him. This is basic Christian truth. A new earth. All the things you have become attached to - pistachio ice cream, the beautiful glance of your children, all the attractions you have to the earth's beautiful things. He teaches us to love Him in this life, not to sweep it all away, but to perfect it for all eternity. A new heaven and a new earth. What are you looking forward to? I hope I can sing.

We must put on immortality. Heaven will be better with a body and hell will be worse. We achieve resurrection of the body for heaven or hell. The sufferings of hell are made so by its intensity; just as heaven is made wonderful in its intensity.

(Luke 16:19, Lazarus and the rich man.)

## Hell

Russian author Dostoyevsky wrote, "The suffering of being unable to love." This is hell in a sentence. What hell is in its essence. Being able to love is a gift from God. Hell is the absence of it. Some of us might say, well that's where my beer buddies are. Heaven's boring, hell's where the fun's happening. Well what is hell really like? It is a place God had to make. He had to make a place where those who reject Him could dwell eternally. It's His place. He made it to allow you to continue your existence at your choice. Pope JPII said, "hell is the definitive self-exclusion from God." You choose it! You send yourself. God sends no one. He creates the terms, you choose. Whatever you choose, will be given you. He takes you so seriously He will not interfere with your choice.

For those who die in mortal sin, without repenting, they remain separated from Him forever by their own free choice. Our Catechism says, our freedom opens us up to the radical possibility of great love, and the possibility of great hate. You are capable of both. Reassurance, in hell, is gone. An act of hope - "these things are hard, but I trust." In Hell, the lights of faith, hope and love are out. There is no possibility, and the soul is aware of it. There is no hope of any reprieve. One of the things that helps us survive difficulties is hope. Evildoers will be thrown into gehenna, sheol,... They will be thrown into the eternal fire, not out of existence. When God gives the gift of life, it is forever. There is a deep longing in the human heart for God, "I want to see God's face. I want to see him." In hell, you will never see God's face.

The bottom line of hell, as the bottom line of heaven, is not heaven or hell. It's Jesus, or no Jesus. It's not whether to choose a place - it's choosing Jesus.

Accepting God's grace and everything is hard. It's too hard for the *place* of heaven; is too much to bear the weight of your heart. The only thing that will attract you is the love of God. Heaven is not primarily a place. It is a person! I am the way, the truth and the life. Truth is a Person. It is about being in Him. It's about wanting your lover. That is enough to call a soul to an eternal thrilling, fully satisfying embrace. What will it be like? It's like trying to describe the peace of marriage to someone who isn't married yet. Or how you will love your child to someone who isn't a parent yet. That moment is impossible to describe to someone beforehand. That's why it's impossible to describe heaven. The bible says a lot about it. **Rev 21:1** (1392?), John "then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away... prepared a bride adorned for her husband ... Gods dwelling... he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more.... I make all things new. ... They are accomplished. I am the Alpha and the Omega... I shall be his God and he shall be my son." There is an unmistakable family intimacy. Heaven will be family. It is the place for those in the grace and friendship of Christ.

Purgatory (Handout on purgatory in your binder)

Purgatory is true. Only those who die in God's grace and friendship, but are not yet completely purified. Purgatory is heaven's vestibule (mudroom). It's not the second chance spot. There isn't another judgment to determine your destination. Once you're in, there's only one way out. As you know, nothing impure can enter heaven. Not everyone who dies in God's grace and friendship, dies pure. A little boy told his grandmother, "I like purgatory." She was surprised and asked him more. He said, "Oh, I don't intend to go there, but I'm sure glad it's there." That's all you need to know about purgatory. You don't have to go there. You can skip it. A lot of times you'll hear Catholics say "oh I'm going to spend lots of time in purgatory."

You should not shoot for purgatory; you should shoot for heaven. If you shoot for purgatory, you might miss. God's grace is sufficient to perfect you. Jesus would not have commanded it, if it wasn't possible. Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." He wouldn't have said it, if it wasn't possible.

Nothing impure can see God.

Mercy demands that there be a way for such purification to take place. God has made a way for purification to take place if it has not taken place on this earth. The Church has the power of the keys. The Church has the power to bind and loose, as it says in Matthew 16 and 18.

We will live in Communion with the Trinity; a supreme definitive happiness; your cup is overflowing; your soul is filled to the rim. The physicality of heaven, it is a place for your body, as well as your soul. We will see God as He is. We will see Him face to face. Not a quick look, but a loving gaze; in perfect peace. He is your God; and you are His child.

St. Paul - "no eye has seen and no ear heard what God has prepared for those who love Him."  
How wonderful it will be!

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### **Prayer to St Joseph for a happy death**

St Joseph, patron of the dying, obtain for me the grace to die, like thee, in the arms of Jesus and Mary. Amen.