THE LAST THINGS

The Particular Judgment, Heaven, Purgatory, Hell, The Last Judgment, The New Heavens And The New Earth

Homiletic Series by Fr. John Honiotes

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I. THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

1021 Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ. The New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in his second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith. The parable of the poor man Lazarus and the words of Christ on the cross to the good thief, as well as other New Testament texts speak of a final destiny of the soul--a destiny which can be different for some and for others.

1022 Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven-through a purification or immediately, or immediate and everlasting damnation.

At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.

II. HEAVEN

1023 Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face:

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints . . . and other faithful who died after receiving Christ's holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, . . . or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death, . . .) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment - and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven - have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.

1024 This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called "heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

1025 To live in heaven is "to be with Christ." The elect live "in Christ,"[600] but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name.

For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the kingdom.

1026 By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has "opened" heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He

makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

1027 This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."



The Forerunners of Christ with Saints and Martyrs by Fra Angelico, 1423-24

1028 Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory "the beatific vision":

How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ your Lord and God, . . . to delight in the joy of immortality in the Kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God's friends.

1029 In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him "they shall reign for ever and ever."[605]

Frank Sheed, excerpt from *In Heaven Blindness Ends* (May 15, 1958)

For all men in heaven the condition first planned by God will have been restored and better than restored. The soul will be obedient to God, in a closeness and ecstasy of union that unfallen Adam never knew. The body, now glorified, will be completely obedient to the soul. Here on earth our body so often hinders our soul by providing competing pleasures; even in its prime the body does not respond perfectly to the animating energies pouring into it from the soul but has all sorts of imperfections and ailments; it limits the soul, so that we are unable to carry out this or that choice of the will because we find that the body is not up to it. In heaven it will be completely obedient, completely responsive, not tangling the soul in its own limitations, wholly for the soul's use. On earth, even the saints have not experienced that. We get only hints and glimpses, nothing clear and definite, about the details of life in heaven—what the soul does with this so newly-obedient body, for example. As St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "eye has not seen nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man." But after the resurrection of the body the essential bliss of heaven is still the direct seeing of God by the intellect totally in contact with Him: all joys of will, and emotion, and the senses are conditioned by that. The whole being is wholly fulfilled, without emptiness or frustration.

For many, perhaps for most of us, the first reaction to such a straight-forward statement about heaven as we have been considering is a feeling that there seem to be a lot of earthly pleasures we shall miss rather badly.

We imagine ourselves occasionally looking back with longing to the dear dead days before we were raised to eternal bliss. It is hard to avoid sometimes thinking like that, yet we should smile when we catch ourselves doing it. We are very much like the child enjoying his tin soldiers or cowboy outfit, sorry for his elder brother who wastes his time on girls and for his father who does crossword puzzles, sure that he will never be as silly as either of them. THE TRUTH IS that each new state of maturity involves finding new pleasures and shedding old ones. The assumption that we if I find the pleasures of heaven less satisfying than those of earth means that we expect never to mature, but to stay eternally retarded at our present level. What the joy of heaven will be we cannot realize here; there is no way of making actual to ourselves an experience we have never had. Adult joys cannot be conveyed to children; the delight, or even the meaning, of color cannot be conveyed to a blind man. In heaven the blindness of earth will be gone; we shall at last be grown-up.

III. THE FINAL PURIFICATION, OR PURGATORY

1030 All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

1031 The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.

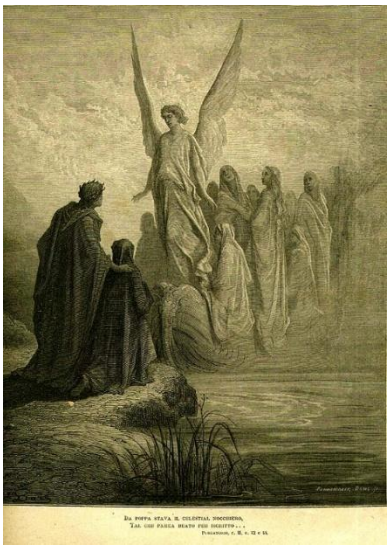
1032 This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin. From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.

St. Francis De Sales on Purgatory

The souls in purgatory are in a constant state of union with God. They are perfectly submissive to His Holy Will, or their will is so transformed into the Will of God, that they cannot wish for anything but what God wishes; in such a way, if paradise were opened to them, they would rather precipitate themselves into hell than appear before God with the stains which they still see on themselves. They are purified voluntarily and lovingly, because such is the Divine good-pleasure. 'Thou are just, O Lord, and Thy judgment is right.' They wish to be there in the manner that pleases God, and for as long a time as He pleases. They are impeccable, and cannot have the least motion of impatience, or be guilty of the smallest imperfection. They love God more than themselves, and more than all things else, with a perfect, pure, and disinterested love. They are consoled by the angels. They are assured of their salvation. Their most bitter bitterness is in the most profound peace. If purgatory is a kind of hell as regards to pain, it is a kind of paradise as regards to the sweetness which charity diffuses through the heart — charity which is stronger than death, and more

powerful than hell, and whose lamps are fire and flames: A state more desirable than terrible, since its flames are flames of love.



Dante's Purgatory (Celestial Helmsman) **by Gustave Dore, 1868**

IV. HELL

1033 We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: "He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren. To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."

1034 Jesus often speaks of "Gehenna" of "the unquenchable fire" reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost.[614] Jesus solemnly proclaims that he "will send his angels, and they will gather . . . all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire,"[615] and that he will pronounce the condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire!"[616]

1035 The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire."[617] The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

1036 The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."[618]

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him

into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth."[619]

1037 God predestines no one to go to hell;[620] for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance":[621]

Therefore, Lord, we pray:
Graciously accept this oblation of our service,
That of your whole family;
Order our days in your peace,
And command that we be delivered from eternal damnation
And counted among the flock of those your have chosen.

Blessed Fulton Sheen, excerpt from Hell, 26 March 1933

There are many reasons why the modern world has ceased to believe in hell, among which we may mention first a psychological reason. If a man has led a very wicked life, he does not want to be disturbed in his wrong doings by harsh words about justice. His wish that there be no final punishment for his crimes thus becomes father to the thought that there is no such thing as hell. That is why the wicked man denies hell, whereas the saint never denies it but only fears it.

Another reason for the denial of hell is that some minds confuse the crude imagery of poets and painters with the reality of the moral order behind the doctrine. Eternal realities are not always easy to portray in the symbols of time and space, but that is no reason why they should be denied by anyone.

A final reason is found in that the doctrine of hell has been isolated from the organic whole of Christian truths. Once it is separated from the doctrines of sin, freedom, virtue, redemption and justice, it becomes as absurd as an eye separated from the body. The justice of this reasoning is borne out in the fact that men become scandalized about hell when they cease to be scandalized about sin. The Church has never altered one single iota the belief in an eternal hell as taught by her Founder, Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In adherence to His divine testimony, the Church teaches firstly that hell is a demand of Justice, and secondly, that hell is a demand of Love.

Love, I say, forgives everything except one thing, and that is the refusal to love. A human heart pursues another and sues for its affection with all the purity and high ardor of its being. It showers the loved one with gifts, tokens of sacrifice, and all the while remains most worthy of a responding affection. But if, after a long and weary pursuit, it has not only been spurned and rejected, and betrayed, that human heart turns away and bursting with a pent-up emotion in obedience to the law of love, cries out: “Love has done all that it can. I can forgive anything except the refusal to love.” Something of this kind takes place in the spiritual order. God is the Great Lover on the quest of His spouse, which is the human soul. He showers it with gifts, admits it into His royal family in the Sacrament of Baptism, into His royal army in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and invites it to His royal table in the Sacrament of the Everlasting Bread, and countless times during human life whispers to it in health and sickness, in sorrow and joy, to respond to His plaintive pleadings, abandon a life of sin, and return love for love. If, however, the human heart, after rejecting this love many times only to be reloved again, after ignoring the knock of Christ at the door of his soul only to hear the knock again, finally, at the moment of death completely spurns and rejects that divine Goodness, then the God of Love, in obedience to the law of love, cries out: “Love has done all that it can. I can forgive everything, except the refusal to love.” And it is a terrible thing to be through with love, for once Divine Love departs at death, it never returns: – that is why hell is eternal! – that is why hell is a place where there is no love!

V. THE LAST JUDGMENT

1038 The resurrection of all the dead, "of both the just and the unjust," will precede the Last Judgment. This will be "the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of man's] voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Then Christ will come "in his glory, and all the angels with him. . . . Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. . . . And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

1039 In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man'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:

All that the wicked do is recorded, and they do not know. When "our God comes, he does not keep silence.". . . he will turn towards those at his left hand: . . . "I placed my poor little ones on earth for you. I as their head was seated in heaven at the right hand of my Father - but on earth my members were suffering, my members on earth were in need. If you gave anything to my members, what you gave would reach their Head. Would that you had known that my little ones were in need when I placed them on earth for you and appointed them your stewards to bring your good works into my treasury. But you have placed nothing in their hands; therefore you have found nothing in my presence."

1040 The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming. Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death.

1041 The message of the Last Judgment calls men to conversion while God is still giving them "the acceptable time, . . . the day of salvation." It inspires a holy fear of God and commits them to the justice of the Kingdom of God. It proclaims the "blessed hope" of the Lord's return, when he will come "to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed."



The Last Judgment by Michael Angelo, 1536–1541

VI. THE HOPE OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

1042 At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign for ever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed:

The Church . . . will receive her perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things. At that time, together with the human race, the universe itself, which is so closely related to man and which attains its destiny through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ.[631]

1043 Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, "new heavens and a new earth." It will be the definitive realization of God's plan to bring under a single head "all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth."

1044 In this new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men.[634] "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."



John of Patmos watches the descent of New Jerusalem from God in a 14th-century tapestry

1045 For man, this consummation will be the final realization of the unity of the human race, which God willed from creation and of which the pilgrim Church has been "in the nature of sacrament." Those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, "the holy city" of God, "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." She will not be wounded any longer by sin, stains, self-love, that destroy or wound the earthly community. The beatific vision, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion.

1046 For the cosmos, Revelation affirms the profound common destiny of the material world and man:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

1047 The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, "so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just," sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ.

1048 "We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of man, nor the way in which the universe will be transformed. The form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing away, and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, in which happiness will fill and surpass all the desires of peace arising in the hearts of men."

1049 "Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society."

1050 "When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise . . . according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom."[643] God will then be "all in all" in eternal life:

True and subsistent life consists in this: the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, pouring out his heavenly gifts on all things without exception. Thanks to his mercy, we too, men that we are, have received the inalienable promise of eternal life.

Sheen Article: https://catholicsaints.info/hell-by-venerable-fulton-sheen-26-march-1933/

Sheed Article: https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CTR19580515-01.2.37&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txIN--------