



# **ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST**

## **Our final destiny in God's plan**

### **Texts from the**

### ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***

#### **"I BELIEVE IN LIFE EVERLASTING"**

*The Christian who unites his own death to that of Jesus views it as a step towards him and an entrance into everlasting life. When the Church for the last time speaks Christ's words of pardon and absolution over the dying Christian, seals him for the last time with a strengthening anointing and gives him Christ in viaticum as nourishment for the journey, she speaks with gentle assurance:*

"Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon you. Go forth, faithful Christian! May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God in Zion, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints... May you return to [your Creator] who formed you from the dust of the earth." (Liturgy of Christian Funerals) (1020)

#### **1. The Particular Judgement**

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 judgement 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 speak of a final destiny of the soul - a destiny which can be different for some and for others. (1021)

Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgement 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." (St John of the Cross) (1022)

#### **2. Heaven**

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

"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 when they have been purified after death,...) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgement 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." (Pope Benedict XII) (1023)

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 fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness. (1024)

By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has "opened" heaven to us. 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. (1026)

This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description: "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory "the beatific vision". (1027-1028)

#### **3. The Final Purification, or Purgatory**

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. (1030)

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 [purifying] fire". (1031)

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" (2 Macc 12:46). From the beginning the Church has honoured 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. (1032)

#### **4. Hell**

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 neighbour 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" (1 Jn 3:14-15). 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". (1033)

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. Jesus solemnly proclaims that he "will send his angels, and they will gather...all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire", and that he will pronounce the condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire!" (Mt 13:41-42; 25:41) (1034)

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". 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. (1035)

The teachings 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" (Mt 7:13-14) (1036)

God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a wilful 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” (2 Pet 3:9). (1037)

### 5. The Last Judgement

The resurrection of all the dead, “of both the just and the unjust”, will precede the Last Judgement. 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 judgement” (Jn 5:28-29).

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” (Mt 25:31, 32,46). (1038)

In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man’s relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgement will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life. (1039)

The Last Judgement will come when Christ returns in glory. Through his Son Jesus Christ the Father 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 marvellous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgement will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God’s love is stronger than death. (1040)

The message of the Last Judgement calls men to conversion. 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 marvelled at in all who have believed” (Titus 2:13; 2 Th 1:10). (1041)

### 6. The Hope of the New Heaven and the New Earth

At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgement, the righteous will reign for ever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. “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” (Vatican II, the Church) (1042)

Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal “new heavens and a new earth”. It will be the definitive realisation of God’s plan to bring under a single head “all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10). (1043)

*For man*, this consummation will be the final realisation 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” (Rev 21:2,9). 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. (1045)

*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...” (Rom 8:19-33) (1046)

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. (St Irenaeus) (1047)

*“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 (Vatican II)”.* (1048)

*“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 (Vatican II)”.* God will then be “all in all” in eternal life. (1050)

### IN BRIEF

- **Every man receives his eternal recompense in his immortal soul from the moment of his death in a particular judgement by Christ, the judge of the living and the dead.** (1051)
- **“We believe that the souls of all who die in Christ’s grace... are the People of God beyond death. On the day of resurrection, death will be definitively conquered, when these souls will be reunited with their bodies” (Paul VI).** (1052)
- **“We believe that the multitude of those gathered around Jesus and Mary in Paradise forms the Church of heaven, where in eternal blessedness they see God as he is and where they are also, to various degrees, associated with the holy angels in the divine governance exercised by Christ in glory, by interceding for us and helping our weakness by their fraternal concern” (Paul VI).** (1053)
- **Those who die in God’s grace and friendship imperfectly purified, although they are assured of their eternal salvation, undergo a purification after death, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of God.** (1054)
- **By virtue of the “communion of saints”, the Church commends the dead to God’s mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.** (1055)
- **Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the “sad and lamentable reality of eternal death”, also called “hell”.** (1056)
- **Hell’s principal punishment consists of eternal separation from God in whom alone man can have the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.** (1057)
- **The Church prays that no one should be lost: “Lord, let me never be parted from you”. If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him “all things are possible” (Mt 19:26).** (1058)
- **“The holy Roman Church firmly believes and confesses that on the Day of Judgement all men will appear in their own bodies before Christ’s tribunal to render an account of their own deeds” (Council of Lyons II).** (1059)
- **At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Then the just will reign with Christ for ever, glorified in body and soul, and the material universe itself will be transformed. God will then be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28), in eternal life.** (1060)