

HEAVEN BOUND

The Church and the Last Things

It makes sense that at the end of the year, we should finish up by talking about the final conclusion of God's saving plan, and of the human story

We've looked at the past; now we look to the present and the future

With regard to the *present*, we'll look at the 3-fold structure of the Church

1. What is the Church on Earth like?
2. What is the Church in Purgatory like?
3. What is the Church in Heaven like?

and yes, as we'll see, those in Heaven and in Purgatory are still members of the Church!

With regard to the *future*, we'll look at the consummation of God's plan – the end of this life, and the eternal beginning of the next life.

I. The Church on Earth

- A. The Church on Earth is sometimes called the "**Church Militant**," because we're still fighting the good fight for Christ – still engaged in the struggle against sin and evil.
 1. But here's an important question: How do we know which Church is the real Church that Jesus founded? After all, there are a lot of denominations to choose from!
 2. Well, the Nicene Creed gives us Four Marks, four characteristics, by which we can know Christ's true Church. These marks are **One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic**
 3. Also, you can see all these characteristics at the very beginning of the Church's life, at Pentecost.
- B. So let's look at these four Marks
 1. **One:** This means that the Church must be unified. At Pentecost we read that "They were all together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).
 - a) So which denomination has the greatest power to unify? What's the largest denomination of the largest religion in the world? What's the greatest single international organization on the planet? The Catholic Church.

2. **Holy:** At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit made the Church Holy through the sacraments of Baptism (Acts 2:41) and the Eucharist (“breaking the bread” in Acts 2:42,46).
 - a) So where do you see the most emphasis on the Sacraments? Who has baptized more people, and celebrated more masses, than any other group? The Catholic Church.
3. **Catholic** (=universal): At Pentecost, there are “men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5), and the Church preaches to each in their own language.
 - a) So in which denomination do you see the most races, ethnicities, languages? Where do you see the greatest cultural diversity and enthusiasm for evangelization? Which denomination actually has “Catholic” in its name? The Catholic Church.
4. **Apostolic:** At Pentecost, Peter speaks authoritatively, with the other apostles surrounding him (Acts 2:14-14).
 - a) So where do you most clearly see one man speaking authoritatively for the Church, with the successors of the apostles surrounding him? Where do you see the Pope and Bishops – the heirs of the original apostles – leading God’s people? The Catholic Church

So what does Christ’s Church look like on Earth? It looks like, it is, the Catholic Church.

II. The Church in Purgatory and Heaven

- A. On the Cross, Jesus conquered death itself – which means that death no longer has the power to divide those who remain connected to Him
 1. That’s why we talk about the **“Communion of Saints”** – the community of all those who love and follow Christ – whether in this life or the next.
 2. How are we still connected to Christians who have gone before? Well, most importantly, we can still help them with our prayers, and they can still help us with their prayers.
- B. The Souls in Heaven (“The Church Triumphant”)
 1. If we die in a state of grace – in a state of friendship with God – we will ultimately reach Heaven.
 2. This is the fulfillment of all desire – seeing God face-to-face (1 Corinthians 13:12), as He is, and realizing that He is the source of all perfection and all happiness.

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3. We will also enjoy the eternal, glorious company of Our Lady and all the angels and the saints.
4. Here's an exercise: think of the five happiest moments of your life so far – then imagine that feeling being even more intense, and lasting forever. That'll make you want to go to Heaven.

C. The Souls in Purgatory ("The Church Suffering")

1. If we die in a state of grace and friendship with God, but we still have vices and sins that we need to be purified from, then we must spend some time in Purgatory.
2. Purgatory is basically God's detox center.
 - a) We need to let go of our vanities and lusts and resentments (and just like detoxing from drugs or alcohol, it's going to be painful).
 - b) But our sin and vice is what makes us most miserable on earth – so if we went to heaven with our sins and vices, we wouldn't even be able to enjoy Heaven!
3. So **Purgatory is a mercy** – when you're in Purgatory, you know you're going to Heaven, and you're glad God has given you an opportunity to become well, so that you can really appreciate Heaven when you get there.
 - a) But it is hard and painful to get over your issues, whether in this life or the next – and so the souls in Purgatory appreciate all the prayers they can get!

So that's the Church, in this life and the next. But how will the Church's story end?

III. The End of the World

A. Hell

1. We can't forget to mention that not necessarily everyone will choose to go to Heaven
2. Jesus has offered us forgiveness from every sin – especially in the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation – and there is no evil from which He can't heal us
3. But love must be free, and if we wish we can choose – through our evil decisions and our refusal to repent – to spend our eternity separated from God.
4. This infinite loneliness, selfishness, and isolation from God and the blessed is Hell.

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- a) It is terrifying to see what selfishness does in this life, and it's even more terrifying to think of what it could do to us in eternity. So we pray to God for the grace to be open to His love and healing.

B. The Resurrection of the Body

1. When Christ comes again in glory on the last day, all who have died will get their bodies back.
2. For those who have chosen Heaven, this means we will be able to delight in God and praise Him with our bodies as well as our souls.
3. It means we will experience the joy of Heaven with our full humanity, as God originally intended.

C. How can we imagine this final fulfillment of all God's designs?

Here, it's probably best to let Scripture have the last word:

"THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH. THE FORMER HEAVEN AND THE FORMER EARTH HAD PASSED AWAY, AND THE SEA WAS NO MORE. I ALSO SAW THE HOLY CITY, A NEW JERUSALEM, COMING DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN FROM GOD, PREPARED AS A BRIDE ADORNED FOR HER HUSBAND. I HEARD A LOUD VOICE FROM THE THRONE SAYING, "BEHOLD, GOD'S DWELLING IS WITH THE HUMAN RACE. HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM AND THEY WILL BE HIS PEOPLE AND GOD HIMSELF WILL ALWAYS BE WITH THEM [AS THEIR GOD]. HE WILL WIPE EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES, AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH OR MOURNING, WAILING OR PAIN, [FOR] THE OLD ORDER HAS PASSED AWAY." THE ONE WHO SAT ON THE THRONE SAID, "BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW." THEN HE SAID, "WRITE THESE WORDS DOWN, FOR THEY ARE TRUSTWORTHY AND TRUE." (REVELATION 21:1-5)

How incredible does that sound?

Is that not worth waiting for?

Is that not worth working towards?

LET'S END THE YEAR WITH A PRAYER PRAISING GOD FOR THE MAGNIFICENT OF HIS STORY.

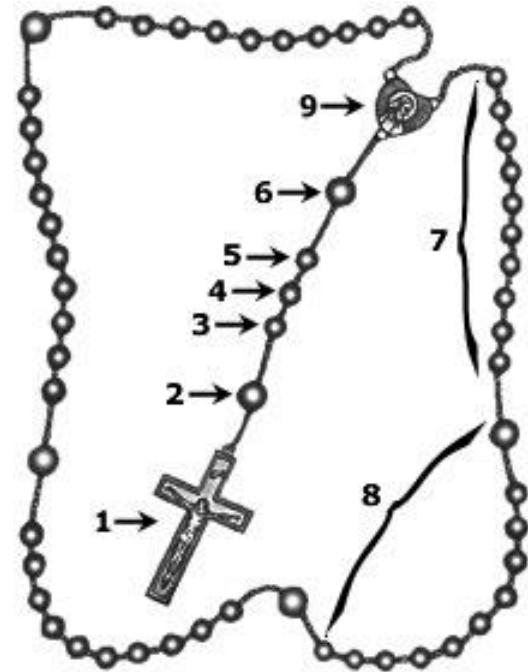
LET'S REMEMBER, EVERY TIME WE SAY "THY KINGDOM COME," WHAT AN ASTONISHINGLY BEAUTIFUL END OF THE STORY WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO.

AND LET'S ASK GOD FOR THE GRACE TO PREPARE OURSELVES TO FOR THAT FEARFUL, GLORIOUS DAY.



THE DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy is recited using ordinary rosary beads of five decades. The Chaplet is preceded by two opening prayers from the Diary of Saint Faustina and followed by a closing prayer.



How to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy:

1. Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. Opening Prayers

You expired, Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O Fount of Life, unfathomable Divine Mercy, envelop the whole word and empty Yourself out upon us.

(Repeat three times)

O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of Mercy for us, I trust in You!

3. Our Father

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.

4. Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

5. The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

6. The Eternal Father

Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

7. On the 10 Small Beads of Each Decade

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

8. Repeat for the remaining decades

Saying the "Eternal Father" (6) on the "Our Father bead and then 10 "For the Sake of His Sorrowful Passion" (7) on the following "Hail Mary" beads.

9. Conclude with Holy God (Repeat three times)

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

10. Optional Closing Prayer

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion-inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to You holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself.