



HIGHLIGHTS FOR TALK 5

WHERE AM I HEADED WHEN I DIE? LIFE AFTER LIFE

- ❖ We should stay mindful of our eternal destiny by reflecting on what are known in Christian tradition as “the four last things”: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. By accepting that the last things imply real personal consequences, one can more easily become a better person and a better child of God in this life, and receive the eternal reward of heaven in the next.
- ❖ Man is made up of a material body and an immaterial soul. The human body is a physical organism made up of biological parts. The human soul animates the body and has the distinctive powers of rationality and free will, which make us capable of knowing and loving. The human soul (unlike the body) is immortal; it is not subject to death or decay. (CCC 366)
- ❖ Man’s death can be defined as “the separation of the soul from the body”. The lifeless body then decays, while the soul continues its existence away from the body outside of time.
- ❖ Animals have souls too. But an animal’s soul is strictly sensory and doesn’t exist independently of its body. The souls of animals are therefore mortal -- they do not survive after the animals die. The human soul, on the other hand, has rationality and free will -- i.e. it has the abilities of knowing and loving. The powers to know and love transcend the physical world. A soul that can do these things is immaterial and independent of the body. Therefore, it does not die -- it is immortal.
- ❖ A person can die only once, and one’s soul remains his or her own even after death. The theory of reincarnation (the idea that, after death, a soul can unite with a different body) is a false teaching.
- ❖ We should strive to live well and pray for a good and holy death. If we always do our best to fulfill our duties and keep our souls in good shape by doing God’s will and going to Confession often, we need not fear death.
- ❖ God’s original intent when he created man was that he should live united in body and soul forever. This freedom from death was one of the “preternatural” gifts that God gave our first parents. Adam and Eve lost their preternatural gifts as well as the supernatural gift of sanctifying grace when they committed the first sin.
- ❖ While Adam’s disobedience resulted in man’s bodily and spiritual death, Jesus Christ (the “new Adam”), through perfect obedience to the Father, conquered death and restored us to the life of divine grace. Justice still requires us to suffer bodily death on account of sin, but for those who love God, dying is now a gateway to heaven.
- ❖ Since we do not know how or when we will die, we need to stay awake and always be prepared. But we should also remember that we are in God’s hands. We will die when He decides it is time, and He will see to it that we have every opportunity to die well.
- ❖ God judges each individual person immediately after his or her death. At that moment, we will instantly learn our eternal fate. This is called the “particular judgment”. Those who die in God’s grace will receive heaven as their reward, while those who spent their lives gratifying their own wills will be lost.



Moms Transmit the Faith

- ❖ Heaven is “being with Christ” (CCC 1025). Only in Him can our desire for happiness be satisfied. A person’s face-to-face encounter with God in heaven is called the “beatific vision”.
- ❖ God desires everyone to be saved. Sadly though, despite all His support and endless mercies, some people simply refuse to accept God’s friendship, and others pay it only “lip service”. God does not interfere with the freedom He gave us to choose our own paths. We need to love God freely. Rejecting God’s love is called sin. Mortal sin severs our relationship with God completely, but even venial sins work to pull us gradually away from the love of God. If we surrender to sin, or fail to fight against it, we become slaves to sin by free choice. If this happens and there is no repentance, man freely chooses to separate himself from God.
- ❖ Hell is real. It is not just an invented myth. Hell is what people choose for themselves when they decide to reject God. Since God is the source of all peace and happiness, the souls in hell who’ve cut themselves off from Him will be restless and sad forever. The souls in hell are said to experience two kinds of pain. The “pain of loss” they feel in being separated from God is much worse than their “pain of sense”, which is comparable to physical suffering.
- ❖ There is another realistic possibility that death will find us neither deserving of hell nor fit for heaven. Man cannot possibly enter into union with God if he is not perfectly clean of heart (Rev 21:27: “nothing unclean shall enter [God’s city]”). Faithful souls that, even so, are unclean due to unconfessed venial sins or lack of temporal remission of their sins, have to undergo a temporary process of purification in a state the Church calls purgatory.
- ❖ Purgatory is a place of purification through suffering. The souls in purgatory also experience a “pain of loss” in being delayed from seeing God; but they know they will enter heaven after being purified. They experience a “pain of sense” too, caused by a “fire” that cleanses them of their impurities.
- ❖ All the members of the Church on earth, in heaven, and in purgatory make up “The Communion of Saints” and share a relationship of unity and cooperation based on sanctifying grace. We on earth are called to offer suffrages for the souls in purgatory (i.e. Masses, prayers, acts of piety, etc.) and to ask the souls in heaven to intercede for us.
- ❖ The cancellation of temporal punishment¹ that a suffrage wins for a soul is called an indulgence. A plenary indulgence takes away all of the temporal punishment that a soul owes for its sins, while a partial indulgence takes away only a portion. To gain a plenary indulgence either for oneself or for a soul in purgatory requires that we perform some act of piety; pray for the Pope; hold the intention of being detached from all sin; and receive both Holy Communion and Reconciliation within the specified timeframe before or after the day the indulgence is granted. Partial indulgences can be earned through acts of piety which the Church recommends.

¹ The Punishments of Sin: “It is necessary to understand that sin has a *double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the “eternal punishment” of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the “temporal punishment” of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin.” (CCC 1472)