

Hell, Communion of Saints, Heaven

There is no doctrine I would more willingly remove. Yet, as odd as it sounds, there is no doctrine that more reveals God's mercy!

-Free Will is the only convincing reason for Hell's existence.

It is as if God said this: "I have made you like myself. You are free to create. It is not I but you who must create your destiny via free-willed choices."

"It is the only place locked from the inside." C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain.

Hence, after the Last Judgment, there are only two possibilities for every human being, heaven or hell

We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love Him.

But we cannot love God if we sin:

1. gravely against Him,
2. against our neighbor
3. or against ourselves:

As the Apostle John writes in his first letter

"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." 3:14-15

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 forever
- by our own free choice.

Hell is this state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed of heaven CCC 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,

In Mark chapter 9:42-49 Jesus teaches that,

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. For every one will be salted with fire.

In Matthew Chapter 13, Jesus solemnly warns that

He "will send his holy angels, and they will gather...all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire."

As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

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."

What does the Church teach about hell?

Here are six things everybody should know about **hell**:

(1) It's real. Following the example of Christ, the Church warns us about the sad and lamentable reality of eternal death, known as *hell* (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1056). From the beginning, it's been the work of Satan to get us to think that hell doesn't exist (cf. Gen. 3:4-5; Jn. 8:44).

(2) Eternal separation from God. Just as the glories of heaven are beyond our limited comprehension, so too we can't fully appreciate in this life the torment that is hell. We do know that hell is eternal, and that the chief punishment of hell is separation from God, who alone can provide us the happiness for which we were created. See *Catechism*, no. 1035.

(3) It's a choice. God does not want any of us to end up in hell. However, in making us free, we are able to make choices that have eternal consequences. By persisting in mortal sin and refusing the merciful love of God up to the time of death, one freely chooses to exclude himself or herself from communion with God and the joys of heaven. **WE CREATED HELL!** See *Catechism*, no. 1033.

(4) Who's there? Well, we don't know. A very, very small percentage of the blessed in heaven are known to us because the Church, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has declared them to be saints through the process of canonization. There is no analogous process for determining any of the human residents of hell, and it's at least possible that even the most heinous, hardened sinners may have repented in the end.

(5) Hope and intercession. Since we know that God wants all to come to repentance and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), we have grounds for hoping that our loved ones who have died have been reconciled with God. The constant prayer of the Church is that all people would turn to the Lord and be saved from final damnation (Catechism, no. 1037). Perhaps those prayers were heard at the 11th hour with respect to our own loved ones. And after their death, we still pray for our deceased loved ones, that they may be purified of their sin and thus obtain the joy of heaven (Catechism, nos. 1030-32).

(6) Call to responsibility. The reality of hell is a wake-up call to each of us to use our freedom well, keeping in mind our eternal destiny. The love of God and neighbor should be the primary motivation for our actions, but a healthy awareness of hell and the desire to avoid it should help motivate us to do the right thing, especially in times of temptation or weakness. See Catechism, no. 1036.

--*Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1033-37*

In Fatima, Our Lady opened the portals to Hell to show to the little children. Why did she do this? Because she wanted them (us) to realize the reality of this place so as to be more vigilant in cooperating with her and Jesus to make sure souls do not go there. This is why she gave the Fatima prayer...
“Help especially those most in need of thy mercy.”

The communion of saints

The devil wants to discourage us from doing God's will

- We tend to lose hope and are tempted to quit in our pursuit of union with God and a life of holiness
- We have a great help in the communion of saints

The angels and saints in heaven

1. Help us by their intercession
2. They encourage us by their example

I. **Heaven is not far from us**

- The Kingdom of Heaven is in our midst
- The Kingdom of Heaven is wherever Jesus the King is
 - He is in your soul; He is in the Eucharist
 - He is present in His Mystical Body which is the Church
 - So also are all those who are united by the Holy Spirit in His Mystical Body
 - Father, Son and Spirit, Angels and Saints

For all who are in Christ, having His Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him

- Ephesians 4:4-16

Their love is perfected in heaven,

- their love reaches out to help us,
- their love is very close
- it is in our midst

- These are our older brothers and sisters (our friends) who want to help us
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II. One Mediator

1 Timothy 2:5 “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”

See the whole context – 1 Timothy 2:1-7

- Paul begins by urging us to pray for each other
- This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior because he desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth
- In fact, this is why Paul was appointed a preacher and Apostle

Christ unites Heaven, God and mankind, in Himself

- His mediation brings us the Gift of the Holy Spirit that unites us in one Body which is the Church which is the Family of God
- Because of the mediation of Christ and the gift of the Spirit we are given gifts and expected to help one another to be saved.
- Again this is the whole point of Ephesians 4

The members of the Mystical Body of Christ (whether here on earth or in heaven) are able to help us:

- Angels
- Annunciation
- Moses and Elijah on Mt. Tabor
- Angel strengthening Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane

- Angels at the Empty Tomb and at the Ascension
- Angels releasing the Apostles from Prison

Though the NT was complete before most of the NT saints died

- The Church has constant experience of the help of the saints
- This led the Apostles to include the doctrine of the communion saints in their creed
 - That is, the unity in Christ of all the redeemed, those on earth and those who have died.

The saints help us in two ways:

1. By their intercession (asking on behalf of others)
2. By their example they give us encouragement

Intercession of the Saints

The saints participate in the one mediation of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Saints don't become gods;
- they participate in His life, love, knowledge, power and in the eternal present of God,
- therefore they have no restrictions of time and space.
- The life of Heaven is one great present moment. It is outside of time.

Just as St. Paul and all the saints worked for the salvation of souls on earth so too from heaven - by praying for us.

St. Therese of Lisieux

“I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth.”

St. Maximilian Kolbe said that while he was on earth he could only help us with one hand because he had to cling to God with the other; when he would be in heaven he would be able to help us with two.

CCC 2683

The saints constantly care for those whom they have left on earth...Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.

Our greatest joy comes through serving, that is, to recognize our gifts and then to use them for the good of others.

- Will God take away our greatest joy in heaven?

Example and Encouragement

Hebrews 11-12 so great a cloud of witnesses

Philippians 3:17

“Brothers, join in imitating me. Pay close attention to those who follow the right example that we have set for you.”

We are called to live our lives in imitation of Christ, he is *the Teacher*.

- But most of us find it difficult to walk on water.
- So God raises up ordinary people just like you and I
- male and female, every age, every walk of life.

He grants to them extraordinary signs of the mystical life of Christ for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all.

He manifests them to the world

1. to be our model
2. to give us encouragement.

The saints teach us how to live

- by having lived in lives and circumstances similar to ours.

If people just like us became saints,

- so can we;
- He gives the grace to make it possible
- Thomas Aquinas' sister asked him what it takes to become a saint.
 - "To will it."

Read and meditate on the example of their lives

Thomas Moore – husband and father

- God is all good – trust him in everything

Heaven

Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings,

- the state of supreme, eternal happiness.

To live in heaven is to be with Christ

Heaven is also a communion of life and love with

- the Father and the Holy Spirit,
- with the Virgin Mary,
- the angels and all the blessed in heaven.

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 2:9,

“No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

1 Cor 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.”

This is why Heaven is called the Beatific Vision

The sight of God face-to-face

God is the source of all goodness,

- therefore our desire for goodness will be totally quenched in him

So what do you long for? You'll get it in Heaven

So it is good to look inside ourselves and see what our deepest longing is

What is the thing about this life that attracts us the most?

Then imagine how heaven will fulfill that desire perfectly

Often times, people think that we'll have to give up our deepest longings to get into heaven

It's not true!

Yes, we have to delay certain gratifications in this life,

- but any good thing we give up here for the sake of God
- He will give us back many times over in Heaven.

Heaven is all gain, it is no loss

As Jesus promises in Matthew Chapter 19

“And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will have eternal life.” Matthew 19:29

Conclusion

We strive for the things we desire in life

We are supposed to strive after union with God and heaven

- but often we desire the things of the world more

Therefore we must increase our desire for God and heaven

- So that we will pursue Him with all our heart.

We increase our desire for anything by thinking about it

Daily meditation is thinking about God and heaven in order to increase our desire for Him

And to Motivate us to pursue Him with all our being

- So that we might reach perfect union with Him

If we would give some time everyday to

1. Reading about God in Scripture or some other book of meditation
2. Reflect or think about these things in silence
3. Remember these things as we go about our day

The result would be that our desire for God would grow

- Leading us to pursue and possess Him in a greater way