

# "I Believe in Life Everlasting"

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## Faith Formation Monthly

ST. LAMBERT PARISH

"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all." (1Cor15:19) Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition both confirm that the end of our earthly life is not the end of our existence. We will exist as an individual person for eternity! This is the "life everlasting" we profess in the Apostles Creed and it's really an amazing reality. You will be *you* forever! But what type of existence will we come to experience after our earthly, physical death? That's the all important question we will explore in this article. The Catechism, paragraph 1020, tells us that "The Christian who unites his own death to that of Jesus views it as a step toward him and an entrance into everlasting life". If we have been seeking and deepening our relationship with Jesus during our earthly life, then this "step toward him" at our death can be the culmination and fulfillment of our life. In the words of St. Paul: "...for to me life is Christ, and death is gain." (Phil 1:21) This fulfillment will begin, however, with what the Church calls our "particular judgment". "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body." (2Cor5:10) Our short life here on earth is the time we have been given to

either accept or reject the saving grace of God. "Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment..." (Heb 9:27) At the very moment of our death we will receive this judgment which will bring us into the blessedness of heaven (through a purification or immediately) or send our souls into immediate and everlasting damnation. (CCC 1022) Heaven is the perfect and joyous life in communion with the Trinity. No more sorrow or pain, it is the "ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings..." (CCC 1024) The fullness of the beatific vision, seeing God as he truly is, face to face, is beyond human understanding and description. It is the perfect happiness that only those who are perfectly purified can enter into. For those who die in God's grace, but have not reached this perfection, there will be a time of purification or *purgatory*. "...the person will be saved, but only as through fire." (1Cor3:15) The witness of many saints over the centuries, through their visions and apparitions of the poor souls in purgatory, give us some idea of what this experience of purification may be like. It is often expressed as both pain of the senses and the pain of loss. That deepest longing and intense desire for communion with God that is just out of our reach. This pain, however, is mixed with a great hope and joy in knowing we will ultimately attain the glorious beatific vision which

will completely fulfill our desire. On the other hand, there is no hope or joy in hell. For those who have rejected God's grace and who die in the state of unrepented mortal sin, which totally separates us from God, that separation will continue for eternity. It is an everlasting hell where, as Jesus himself describes, there is the "wailing and gnashing of teeth" in an eternal fire. (Matt 13:42) We will all face the reality of death and judgment. There is no escape. A monastic tradition explains that we should always be mindful of our death in order to be ready whenever it comes. Are we prepared for that judgment today? Or are we so wrapped up in our worldly lives that we give little thought to our mortality? Our *life everlasting* will be cause for celebration only if we have "...believed in him and remained faithful to his will." (CCC 1026) Our eternal life is at stake! Let us live that life of faith and obedience now so that at the hour of our death we will hear Christ say "...come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"! (Matt 25:34)

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## SACRED SCRIPTURE



"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1John 3:2)

"For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." (2Maccabees 12:44-46)

"...He will answer them, Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt 25:45,46)

"But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." (Matt 5:22)

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt 10:28)

"And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:3)

## SACRED TRADITION

"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." (St. Cyprian)

"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." (CCC 1026)

"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." (CCC 1030)

"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.

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.'" (CCC 1035,36)

### ADDITIONAL READING

- *The Biblical Basis for Purgatory* by John Salza Saint Benedict Press
- *Hungry Souls* by Gerard J.M. Van Den Aardweg TAN Books
- *Purgatory Explained by the Lives and Legends of the Saints* by Fr. F.X. Schouppe, S.J. TAN
- *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis