

*Please kindly refrain from making changes to the text without permission from the author.*

## The Four Last Things – Death (Part 1)

A few year ago I came across a devotional book written by St. Alphonsus Ligouri entitled **“Preparation for Death.”** We do not often think about **death** as something we can prepare for outside of **“making our arrangements”** with a Funeral Director or our local Pastor. The Church sees things a little differently.

To assist her sons and daughters prepare well for the Lord when he comes she has recommended throughout the ages, the eternal truths. The eternal truths, or four last things, are: **death, judgment, hell and heaven.** As the liturgical year winds up in this calendar month, we will take some time in the coming weeks to look at each truth in succession and some of the practical considerations that follow from them for our faith practice day-to-day.

The first of the four last things is appropriately: **death.** In the Book of Ecclesiastes we read: **“There is...a time to be born and a time to die.”**<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa reflect upon these words in the following way: **“The fact that there is a natural link between birth and death is expressed very clearly in this text of Scripture. Death invariably follows birth and everyone who is born comes at last to the grave.”**<sup>2</sup>

The Catechism treats death in the following way. **First**, death is the end of earthly life. Death marks the end of the time we might merit that grace which redounds to our salvation in the here and now. **Second**, death is a consequence of sin. Scripture and tradition teach plainly that death entered the world through man’s sin(s). The God of life does not welcome death as such but in his goodness is able to use even so great an evil to man’s ultimate good. Which brings us to the **third and final point**: death is **transformed** in Christ. Death is now the portal by which man enters into the fullness of eternal life tasted only here below in part.

So how do we **prepare** for a good death (a death that leads to entrance into heaven). Simply, in order to **“die well”** we need to **“live well.”** What might that look like?

**First**: how well do I love God? Tangibly, do I have a habit of daily prayer, intimate conversation with God, and a vibrant sacramental life with regular confession and communion. At the end of our lives, tangibly this means **“last rites.”** When we know someone is in danger of death however conscious or unconscious we ought to try and ensure a priest is able to visit them. The **“last rites”** simply means the last sacraments and prayers of commendation we receive before our final journey to the Father. These ordinarily include: making a good confession, receiving the anointing of the sick, as well as Viaticum (our final communion before dying).

---

<sup>1</sup> Eccl. 3:1, 2

<sup>2</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily 6, on Ecclesiastes* in Menezes, Fr. Wade, *The Four Last Things: A Catechetical Guide to Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell* (Kindle Locations 187-190). EWTN Publishing, Inc. . Kindle Edition.

***Second:*** how well do I love my neighbor? St. Ignatius Loyola, in his exercises recommends his retreatants at one point to consider the day-to-day decisions of life from their deathbed. Would we do things differently? Such considerations can spur us to ever more courageous acts of faith, hope and charity each day. Such acts benefit not only our own souls but those of the ones dearest and nearest to us as prepare to our own accounting on the last day. ~Fr. Matthew Biedrzycki

***Next week: Judgement.***