

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)

What we are doing now. The catechetical process consists of four periods leading to receiving the sacraments of initiation and beyond into a final period called the neophyte year or mystagogy. This first period is called the precatechumenate and will extend until late November when candidates declare their intention to the Church. The first period consists of inquiry on the part of the “inquirer” or “candidates” and of evangelization and the precatechumenate on the part of the Church. During this time, the RCIA team gives a suitable explanation of salvific events and the Gospel and provides an opportunity to experience the company and spirit of Christians in our community. Inquirers are seeking the truth and the team transmits the words and deeds of revelation. There are no liturgical rites in this period because inquirers have not yet entered into a formal relationship with the Church through the Rite of Acceptance. All inquirers have been given a binder full of conversion stories, informational articles about our faith and examples of common Catholic prayers. Many of the questions asked early on are being answered and some are addressed specifically.

Catechism for All of Us...

Our catechist, Patty Norris gave an excellent presentation on the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. What happens when we die? How are we judged? How do we prepare? What is it like in Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory?

God wills all to be saved, but the time for accepting or rejecting God ends at death. Death ends the decisions of the will and the time to respond to the Father's grace and mercy. Death is defined as the separation of the body and soul at the end of one's earthly life; however, one's faculties are retained to face judgment. Death is a consequence of Original Sin. Particular Judgment occurs for each individual person at the moment of their death. Beware: the measuring rod is Jesus Christ. At death, our lives will be laid bare and we will be judged on our love. Each person receives either eternal glory or eternal damnation. In contrast, the General Judgment is the revelation of the eternal destination of all persons at the end of time. *Then will the conduct of each one and the secrets of hearts be brought to light. Then will the culpable unbelief that counted the offer of God's grace as nothing be condemned. Our attitude about our neighbor will disclose acceptance or refusal of grace and divine love. (CCC 678)* On the last day Jesus will say: *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40).* There is no reincarnation after death: *“And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment....” (Heb 9:27)*

There are two consequences of sin: eternal punishment and temporal punishment. *If we commit a sin and are forgiven of that sin, the effect of the sin still remains.* Temporal is something that lasts only for a time, it is the opposite of eternal. *The Church Suffering* is those souls who have died in genuine friendship with the Lord, but without complete spotlessness from the temporal punishment due for their sins; these are the souls in purgatory. Purgatory remits the effect of temporal punishment, they are undergoing final purification in Purgatory (See Gn 3:16-17, 2 Sm 12:13-14.) The tradition of the Church speaks of a cleansing fire. Purgatory is the mercy of God; it is a place of expectant joy. These humans know that they will see God and intensely yearn to be purified before their entry into heaven. They offer their suffering in prayer on behalf of those on earth. One way to look at Purgatory is found in this example. You have been invited to an extravagant dinner party hosted by Bill Gates. You have been working in the garden all day and you are covered in sweat and topsoil. You would not dare show for dinner without a shower and fresh clean clothes to wear. So do we yearn to be spotless in God's sight. Besides if we were to enter with all our faults and shortcomings, it wouldn't be heaven, would it? It would be earth again! Orthodox churches and Jews believe in a form of Purgatory and praying for the dead. (CCC 1032)

The faithful, after a final purification in purgatory, if needed, will live forever in Heaven. Heaven is that place where those who die in the grace and friendship of Christ, perfectly purified, live in happiness forever in communion with the Trinity. Our desire for true happiness finds fulfillment. We will enter heaven if we **persevere** in God's friendship and grace until death. *...and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*" (Mk 13:13)
Also: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus...." (Hb 12:1) Heaven is eternal joy and happiness, our final reward: we will see God face-to-face (beatific vision), see all the angels and saints, all of our relatives and friends, it will be truly amazing! *"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him."* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Evildoers will live forever in Hell, the place of eternal, incomprehensible *self-exclusion* from God and the blessed, everlasting punishment and endless pain. Those who die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love remain separated from God by their own choice; one of the chief torments of Hell. Hell is necessary for those who choose to ignore, offend or hate God. The reality of judgment calls all to faith and conversion.

Asked and Answered. Why does God permit evil? Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil. This was realized in a wondrous way by God in the death and resurrection of Christ. In fact, from the greatest of all moral evils (the murder of his Son) he has brought forth the greatest of all goods (the glorification of Christ and our redemption).

Read it for yourself: CCC: 678-679, 988-1004, 1005-1014, 1020-1050, 1472, 2548-2550.