

# The Last Things

## *What Happens After Death?*

### **What do Catholics believe happens at death?**

At death, each person is immediately judged by God. We will be judged according to our actions here on earth, as Jesus describes in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Matthew 25:31-46) If we die spiritually in union with God, we will be eternally united with him. If we die spiritually separated from God, we will be eternally separated from him by our own free choice.

### **How does one become united with God?**

Baptism is the normal way that God has chosen to make us a new creation and give us the gift of his divine life.

We are then in a state of union and friendship with God. We can strengthen this union with God through prayer, acts of love, and accepting the daily opportunities he offers us to grow closer to him. When we sin, we need to repent and ask the Lord for his forgiveness.

### **What will heaven be like?**

People often imagine heaven as a sort of endless amusement park, where one can do all the things one likes to do on earth. This is not the case, thankfully; any earthly activity would get boring quickly! Heaven is a state of perfect union with God, for whom our hearts were made, and it is this union that is the cause of our rejoicing in heaven. We will know and rejoice with everyone else in heaven, the angels and the saints.

### **How can a loving God send people to hell?**

Since heaven is the state of being united to God, only those who actually love him can be part of it. Even God cannot force anyone to love him, since authentic love cannot be compelled. Hell is a state of eternal separation from God, and it is this separation that is the primary source of hell's misery. If a person is in hell, it is not due to a lack of love on God's part, but rather to that person's own free decision to reject God's love.

### **Don't Catholics believe in something called purgatory?**

Yes. Many who die in a state of union with God, and therefore are destined to heaven, still have a number of spiritual faults and sinful attachments. Nothing unclean or impure can enter heaven. (Rev. 21:27) Thankfully, in his great mercy, God allows us to be spiritually cleansed or purified prior to entering heaven, and it is this cleansing that we call purgatory. Everyone being cleansed in purgatory is happy because they are being prepared for heaven.

### **Where can I learn more about such topics?**

In these messages we are necessarily limited in the detail we can go into on any particular topic. To learn more about particular Catholic teachings, it is helpful to go straight to the source. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, an official summary of all Catholic teachings, can easily be read online. Catholic Answers ([www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)) is another very helpful place to find answers to particular questions; just type in a question or subject!