

## **SEGMENT NINE**

**THEME: “LAST THINGS” –**

**Judgment, Heaven, Purgatory, Hell, Divine Mercy**

**OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Cor 2: 6-12**

“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. Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 2: 9-10

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...in hope because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay...we know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8: 19-23

### **INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:**

God desires that “all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). God’s desire for the salvation of every human person is the basis for our reflections on death, judgment, heaven, purgatory, hell, and eternal life with God. Only in light of God’s unfailing offer of friendship and covenant love do we best understand Catholic beliefs about the “Last Things.” In light of Jesus’ victory over death in his resurrection we have the certain hope of our eternal union with God.

Created by God each one of us was made with the capacity to be in relationship with God, in communion with God and with one another. Heaven is our ultimate destiny. During our earthly existence we grow in our relationship with God through prayer, reflection on God’s word, the sacraments, and through our imitation of Jesus’ example of love and service. Our ultimate destiny is eternal communion with God and with those united in Christ before God.

The mystery of our future eternal communion with God is beyond human understanding or description in human language. The contemplation of God in his heavenly glory, called the “beatific vision” is the ultimate destiny of each one of us.

- ❖ Each person receives a “particular judgment” at the moment of death. Based on our love of God and neighbor we are granted entrance to heaven into communion with God, or to a period of purification, or to eternal separation from God. (CCC, 1021 – 1022)
- ❖ Those who die in God’s grace and friendship enter into “heaven” which is the ultimate end and fulfillment of our deepest human longings for happiness. In heaven we enter into perfect communion with our Creator – what we were created for in the first place. Heaven is perfect existence with the Most Holy Trinity, it is communion of life and love with Christ and all those who believe in Him and remained faithful to Him. ((CCC, 1023 – 1029)
- ❖ The mystery of blessed communion with God and those united in Christ is beyond human understanding and description. Scripture describes heaven in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise. (CCC, 1027)
- ❖ All who die in God’s friendship but are still imperfect in their love for God are assured of eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to be prepared to enter God’s presence in the joy and light of heaven. (CCC, 1030)
- ❖ The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification or cleansing of sins based on certain texts of Scripture that speak of a cleansing fire – 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Peter 1:7 (CCC, 1031)
- ❖ The Catholic practice of praying for our deceased loved ones particularly for those undergoing the purification of *purgatory* is drawn from scripture (2 Maccabeus 12:36). From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers so that our departed loved ones through purification may attain the joy of heaven. (CCC, 1032)
- ❖ Through our own free choices we can refuse to accept God’s love and forgiveness. If we reject God’s love by remaining in mortal sin (willful turning away from God) we separate ourselves from God forever by our own free choice. The state of “definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the community of the blessed is called “hell.” (CCC, 1033). By choosing against God during our earthly life we exclude ourselves from His eternal presence in heaven. “God predestines no one to go to hell” (CCC, 1037)
- ❖ It is our responsibility to make use of our freedom and to pursue the path of daily conversion in view of our eternal life.

- ❖ At the end of time, God's Kingdom will come in fullness. The "Last Judgment" or general judgment will come when Christ returns in glory...we shall know the ultimate meaning of creation...and that God's love is stronger than death." (CCC 1038-1041)

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

**The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.**

1. Newspapers and television broadcasts daily surround us with accounts of suffering, violence and death. How do Catholic beliefs in the "Last Things" help us better understand the mystery of human suffering and death?
2. What new insight(s) have you gained from your reflection on the "Last Things?"
3. Discuss ways in which Catholic beliefs in eternal life differ from popular or contemporary understandings of life after death.

## **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:**

Luke 16:22; 23: 43  
Matthew 16: 26; 22:13; 25:13, 31-46  
John 14:3  
1 John 3:2  
1 Corinthians 13:12  
2 Corinthians 5:8  
Philippians 1:23; Ephesians 1:10  
1 Thessalonians 4:17  
Hebrews 9: 27; 12:23  
1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 1: 9-10  
2 Peter 3:13  
Rev 2:17; 22:4-5

“Go forth, Christian soul, from this world  
in the name of God the almighty Father,  
who created you,  
in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God,  
who suffered for you,  
in the name of the Holy Spirit,  
who was poured out upon you.  
Go forth, faithful Christian!”

*Prayer of Commendation, OCF*

“Father accept this offering  
from your whole family.  
Grant us your peace in this life,  
Save us from final damnation,  
And count us among those you have chosen.”

*Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I, 88*

“But in order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the "why" of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God...we must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is: also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ. “

Pope John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering, 13.*

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:**

Universal Catechism, “*I Believe in Life Everlasting*,” Articles 1020 – 1060

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, article 48

Pope John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering, Salvifici Doloris*, Apostolic Letter, February 11, 1984.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Our Father