

FROM LIFE ON EARTH TO LIFE ETERNAL

(Homily in Solemn Requiem Mass in St Patrick Seminary, San Francisco,

3 November, 2018)

The liturgical celebrations of All Saints Day and then of All Souls Day put before us the ultimate realities that face human earthly pilgrimage. The traditional name for them is the four last things, namely, Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven.

Death is the ending of our earthly travel. The soul gets separated from the body and goes before God for the particular judgment. We do not know the day nor the hour, but we pray to our Blessed Mother, Mary Immaculate, to intercede for us now and at the hour of our death.

By **particular judgment** is meant that the soul at the moment of death goes before God to receive the eternal retribution due to the individual, in accordance with his or her performance on earth according to God's will, or on the contrary a life lived against the divine commandments. The possibilities are entrance into the blessedness of heaven, either directly or after purification, or otherwise eternal damnation.

The terrible possibility of **hell** for the individual is not solved by suggestion that discussion on eternal damnation in hell fire is bad for children's psychology. A student should know that there will be an examination at the end of the academic year. If this upsets the lazy student and makes him or her sit up and study, then it is a healthy tonic. The Lord Jesus was very clear on the existence of hell. He warns us that "if a man calls him (i.e. his neighbour) renegade, he will answer for it in hell fire" (Mt 5:22). At the end of the world, the Son of Man "will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that provoke offences and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth" (Mt 13:41-42). At the last judgment, those who have not shown love of neighbour will be condemned: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire" (Mt 25:41). There is no doubt that Jesus warns us that hell is a reality.

The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity "for those who die in a state of mortal sin" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, henceforth CCC, 1035). This possibility of eternal separation from God, for whom alone men and women are created, is a call to responsibility incumbent on everyone to use freedom well while there is still time on earth. The Lord Jesus invites us 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” (Mt 7:13-14).

Heaven is the reason why God created every man and woman. It is perfect vision of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is seeing God as he is, face to face (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). It is perfect life with the Most Blessed Trinity, with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed. It is attainment of the final end of our creation. Holy Scripture applies to heaven images such as the following: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise (cf CCC, 1027). “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

Purgatory is the name which the Church gives to the final purification of the elect. Since no one with even a small stain may enter heaven, people who die in God’s grace and friendship, but are “still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of eternal salvation, but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC, 1030). Saint Gregory the Great declares: “He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come” (St Gregory the Great: *Dial.* 4, 39: PL 77,396; cf also Mt 12:31; CCC, 1031).

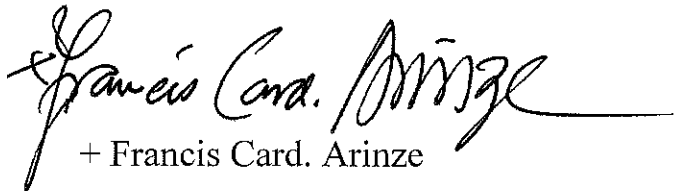
That is why the Church traditionally prays for the souls of the faithful departed, offers for them the Sacrifice of the Mass, offers expiation for their eternal release in many other prayers, and promotes works of almsgiving and mortification in favour of the souls in purgatory.

A conclusion is that **our time of life on earth should be taken seriously** by every follower of Christ. The years of life on earth are not an empty concert show. Down here are laid the foundation and preparation of what is likely to be our final destiny. Saint Augustine warns us that God who made us without our cooperation, will not save us without our cooperation (cf St Aug: *Sermo*, 169, c 11, 13). Although God’s grace is absolutely necessary so that we can accomplish any good work for our salvation, and although God’s grace begins, accompanies and brings our action to a happy conclusion, it is also God’s will that we give our cooperation. This is one of the ways in which the saying of Jesus can be understood: “Since John the

Baptist came, up to this present time, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm” (Mt 11:12).

The improvement of life in the earthly city is also part of our faith commitment. The Christian must not, under preoccupation with preparing for eternal life in heaven, become an irrelevant citizen of the earthly city. “Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 39). This is another way of saying that a good Christian has to be a good citizen. “The Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of both cities, to perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities...The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbour, neglects God himself, and endangers his eternal salvation” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 43).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, to intercede for us, that guided by the light of our faith in the austere final realities of death, judgment, hell and heaven, we may always, with God’s grace, live as genuine followers of our Lord Jesus Christ and attain eternal life.



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