

reassured that God refuses Himself to no person of good will who lives by the dictates of their conscience. Every soul has come from God and our conscience, for all of us, is the sure guide back to Him. Unfortunately our conscience can become battered and compromised as we move through life and it can use all of the help it can get. Once again, a sure way of obtaining this help is to bring Christ into your life and fortunately this is not all that difficult to do. It's as simple as asking Jesus to come into our hearts wherever you happen to be in life at that moment.

To begin with, any sort of simple prayer of request will do: "Please Lord Jesus help me, teach me, guide me." He will bring you into touch with people, books, teachers and events that will help you to find your way.

In the event that you do bring Christ into your life, why don't you look into the Roman Catholic Church whose present day Bishops are the direct spiritual descendants of the Apostles? "Catholic Mission Leaflets" publishes a leaflet called "Approaching the Catholic Church for the First Time" which you may find helpful. Another way is to phone a parish that is near to where you live and ask about their adult education classes. These classes are open to anyone and do not obligate you in any way to join the Church. You can usually find a listing of Catholic Churches in the Yellow Pages of most phone books. Meanwhile may our Lord bless you and we at "Catholic Mission Leaflets" will keep you, the reader of this Leaflet, in our prayers.

-William J. Bradley

The following leaflets are also available and all of our leaflets are written by Roman Catholic authors:

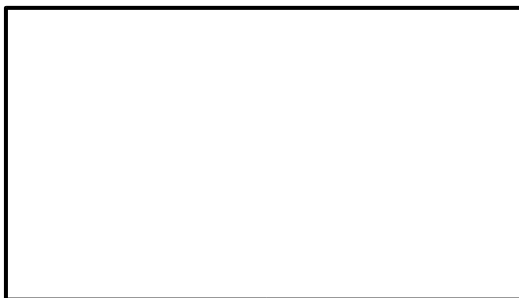
- An Invitation from the Rock.
- Can Human Reason Lead Us To Believe in the Existence of God?
- Praying the Rosary.
- Is the Story of Fatima for Today?
- Why Should I go to Mass on Sunday?
- What is the Catholic Church Anyway?
- What is the Holy Eucharist?
- What is the Sacrament of Penance?
- What is the Sacrament of Baptism?
- Who is the Pope?
- Approaching the Catholic Church for the first time.

Internet email: catholic@catholicmissionleaflets.org
Web Page: <http://www.catholicmissionleaflets.org>

NOTE: If you would like to know more about the Roman Catholic Church, simply look up the one nearest you, in the Yellow Pages of any phone book, and enquire about the adult information courses that are available and offered without any obligation at all to the enquirer.

You may photocopy and distribute this leaflet or log on to our site above and pick up a fresh copy for printing.

Local Contact:



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WHAT HAPPENS TO ME WHEN I DIE?



A few years ago I became the Secretary of our Parish Cemetery Committee and being a small rural parish those duties include helping with the supervision and maintenance of our two cemeteries. Through the Spring, Summer and Fall, I am often in one or the other of our graveyards, checking on its condition or marking out a grave.

Naturally this sort of work turns your thoughts to what a graveyard is for and the type of death that brings those who come to it for the last time. As a Catholic who tries to practice his faith, I hope and pray that all of those who make their last journey to their final resting place in our cemeteries, or any other, were prepared for that journey and their entry into eternal life that went before it.

Sometimes death comes swiftly and without warning. One of our cemeteries is the last resting place for three young men of our parish who died in car accidents and one young lady who was run down at a city intersection. Or as in the case of a 53 year old friend of mine who went to bed with the flu and did not wake up in the morning. All we can do in situations like these is pray that these individuals were in a state of grace with God when death came calling.

There is not a man or woman on this earth who does not have to come to terms with death, it is a part of life. From the moment we are conceived we start to walk a downhill road to the grave. When we are younger we can put it out of our minds as it seems to be so far away. As time slips by though and we get older we start to think more about the end of things as it applies to us as an individual and this seems to happen to us whether we want to think about it or not. The fact that there is less and less time in front of us, than what is piled up behind, has its effect.

For the Christian, death should come as a welcome release from the trials of this life and no matter who we are or how many material possessions we have the trials are there. The truth is, Christian or not, death is that "something" ahead of us that often fills many of us with dread. We will struggle and strive and do whatever we can to put off this natural end of things for as long as possible. Modern science has made great contributions in our battle against illness and disease, but that inevitable day finally comes when all physical intercession comes to an end and we set out on our final journey.

There is nothing wrong in our struggling to maintain our lives, in fact, we have a moral duty to look after ourselves, and not put ourselves into situations of unnecessary danger that may rob us of life. Deep in all of us is a God given drive for self preservation otherwise the human race would have died out countless ages ago. Eventually though, the time comes when our heart stops and we step out from our physical bodies, encumbered and enhanced by how we treated others, for that is what it all finally comes down to, and we come face to face with God. At this point God's mercy, which has been available to us all our lives ends and His infinite Justice takes over.

In whatever way death happens to us the Church teaches that at the moment of death we come to "The Particular Judgment". The "Catechism of the Catholic Church", from which all the following quotations will be taken, describes it this way: "Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ. The New Testament often speaks of Judgment in terms of the final accounting with Christ at his second coming but it also affirms that each of us will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with our works and faith (1021). Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven - through purification or immediately -, or immediate and everlasting damnation (1022)." In other words, if our lives merit it, male or female, we are rewarded with life in heaven after having been purified or, eternal damnation in hell.

Those who enter straight into Heaven are called Saints by the Church. Some of them are known to us in this life but countless tens of thousands reach heaven immediately who are known only to God. "Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they 'see Him as He is,' face to face...(1023)This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called 'heaven' (1024). The elect live 'in Christ, but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name (1025). By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has 'opened' heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ (1026). In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with Him 'they shall reign for ever and ever'(1029)."

Then there are those who have made their peace with God and have died in the State of Grace, but they are in need of some purification before they enter heaven. "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven (1030). The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned (1031). This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in scripture: Therefore (Judas Maccabeus) made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.' (2 Mace. 12:46)(1032)."

This teaching on Purgatory is one that a great many people outside of the Roman Catholic Church have a lot of trouble accepting. Today in our secular humanist world a great many of us believe that there is no such thing as sin so how can there be any punishment for it. It follows then that if we cannot be faulted for our actions then we can't be punished and if we can't be punished how can there possibly be a Hell let alone a Purgatory.

When this teaching about Purgatory came into my life as an adult convert, it answered a nagging concern that I could not quite get rid of or have adequately explained. Although Jesus Christ has by his redemptive death opened the way to heaven for all men, I still did not think that my own purification was such that I merited immediate entrance into heaven while at the same time I did not think that I merited eternal damnation in hell either. The purifying fires of Purgatory answered these questions for me and the teaching fitted well with my image of a loving Father whose will it is that all of us come to live with

Him for all eternity. Didn't Christ say that we cannot enter heaven until we have paid the last penny?

Then there is hell itself and the Catholic Catechism describes hell in the following way: "We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against Him, against our neighbour or against ourselves. 'He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 Jn. 3:14-15).' Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from Him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren (Mt. 25:31-46). To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from Him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called 'hell' (1033). The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishment of hell's 'eternal fire (1035).' God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end (1037)." Hell is a state of total isolation to yourself in a state of absolute lovelessness for all of eternity.

The Church and Scripture teach us that we do not have the right to judge another or to decide the final destination of any soul. There is nobody living that can know how God deals with a soul and how that soul reacts in the final seconds of its life. A person can be unconscious to our eyes, yet a lot of activity between God and that soul could still be going on. All it takes is one cry for forgiveness from that soul, a movement of the heart toward God, and He will come with love and forgiveness and take that soul to Himself forever. However, if you are that soul that is suddenly struck down, how can you be sure that you will have the time or the grace to cry out to God in those final seconds or even fractions of a second?

All it takes to be sure about your final destination is to bring Christ into your life. If you are a baptized Catholic but you have been away from your faith, maybe for a long time, why don't you try going back to Mass? Hundreds and thousands of conversions have begun with an attendance at Mass either alone or with a friend. While you are there ask our Lord, who is sacramentally present on the altar, to lead you home and He will. It may not be an easy journey, and in some situations of life it may take time, but if you are faithful the Lord will not fail you.

For those who have been born and raised outside of the Catholic Church, or even any church at all, you can be