

The Easter Triduum: contemplating Death and Resurrection, Hell and Heaven



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The three holiest days in the Church's liturgical calendar offer an opportunity to reflect on what used to be called "The Four Last Things": death, judgement, hell and heaven.

By Seàn-Patrick Lovett

It was at a morning Mass in Santa Marta, back in November 2016, that Pope Francis mentioned how the world "does not like to think" about the **Four Last Things**. The reason, he suggested, is that death, judgement, hell and heaven, are just too scary to contemplate. The truth, he continued, is that if you choose to live your whole life far away from the Lord, you run the risk of "continuing to live far away from Him for all eternity".

Visions of Hell

Pope Francis has made his personal vision of Hell quite clear on several occasions. During another homily in the Vatican in 2016, he said Hell is not “a torture chamber”. Rather, it is the horror of being separated forever from the “God who loves us so much”. His predecessor, **Pope St John Paul II**, said something similar in 1999: not so much a physical place, he explained, “Hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy”.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

It was **Pope Benedict XVI**, in 2007, who said that Hell “really exists and is eternal...even if nobody talks about it much anymore”. When he was still Cardinal Ratzinger, he was responsible for much of the work involved in updating the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The same Catechism not only affirms the existence of Hell and its eternity, but confirms that “the chief punishment of Hell is eternal separation from God”.

Death and Judgement

“No one sends you to Hell”, said Pope Francis when he met with a group of children during a [visit to a Rome parish](#) in 2015: “You go there because you choose to be there”. That’s how we know the Devil is in Hell, he continued, “because the Devil wanted to be there”. At an Angelus Address in August 2016, the Pope stressed how, at the end of this life, “we will all be judged”. But, he continued, “the Lord offers us many opportunities to save ourselves” and, until the end, “He never tires of forgiving us and waiting for us”.

Salvation and Heaven

During the same [Angelus Address](#), Pope Francis confirmed how the most serious and important goal of our human existence is that of achieving “eternal salvation”. “If we are faithful to the Lord”, he said at another Mass in Santa Marta in 2016, we have nothing to worry about. On the day of Judgment “we will look at the Lord” and say: “I have many sins, but I have tried to be faithful”. And all will be well: “Because the Lord is good”.

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[Vatican News](#)