

# THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Short reflections, eternal truths



## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

Judgment, Heaven, Hell  
and Purgatory

FR LUKE GOYMOUR

## **“He Will Come Again in Glory to Judge the Living and the Dead”**

In the Creed, we profess: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” These words are not abstract doctrine—they are a bold proclamation of hope, justice, and divine love. Yet in many parish settings today, the “last things”—death, judgement, heaven, hell, and purgatory—are rarely spoken of. Why?

Perhaps it’s because past preaching often leaned heavily on fear, painting judgement in “fire and brimstone” tones. This approach, while sincere, often kept people in the pews through anxiety rather than love. Today, we rightly emphasise God’s mercy and compassion. But if we forget that love includes justice, we risk losing sight of the fullness of our faith.

Judgement is not a threat—it is a promise. It is the assurance that Christ, who loves us, will also set things right.

## **What Happens When We Die?**

The Church teaches that at the moment of death, each person undergoes what is known as the particular judgement. This is not some arbitrary decision, but rather a true reflection of the choices we have made throughout our lives, especially in terms of how we have responded to God’s love and grace.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states:

“Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgement that refers his life to

Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately—everlasting damnation.” (CCC 1022)

This particular judgement results in one of three possible outcomes:

1. Heaven: For those who die in a state of friendship with God and are already fully purified, heaven is the immediate reward—a share in the blessedness of God’s presence. Heaven is not simply a distant, abstract idea, but the fulfilment of our deepest hopes and longings. It is perfect communion with God, where every trace of sorrow, suffering, or separation is wiped away. The Church teaches that in heaven, the soul enjoys the vision of God—what is called the “beatific vision”—seeing Him face to face, knowing Him as He truly is, and being united with Him in everlasting joy.
2. Purgatory: For those who die in God's friendship, yet still carry the remnants of sin or imperfect love, there is the merciful gift of purgatory. Purgatory is not a place of punishment, but a state of purification. The Church teaches that “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” (CCC 1030). Imagine it as a healing process, where the soul is made whole and holy, freed from the lingering effects of sin. This purification is motivated by love—God desires that we be with Him in perfect communion, and purgatory is the means by which He prepares us for that fullness. It is not about fear or dread, but about hope and the certainty of God’s mercy at work, even beyond the grave. The prayers and sacrifices of the living can assist those in purgatory, expressing

the deep spiritual connection of the entire Church, both living and departed. This is why we have Mass offered for those who have died, through the great the prayer of the Mass, the fruits of Jesus' eternal sacrifice are applied to the person who has died.

3. Hell: For those who, by rejecting love, goodness and truth, freely choose separation from God, hell is the self-chosen reality of eternal isolation from Him.

It's important to remember that we must not simply presume that everyone goes straight to heaven. Jesus himself cautions us:

“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.”  
(Matthew 7:13-14)

This teaching is not intended to frighten us, but to awaken our hearts and minds. Our decisions truly matter; our lives have eternal significance. God's justice does not stand in opposition to His mercy—it is through His justice that His mercy finds its fullest expression. Purgatory, therefore, stands as a testament to both God's justice and His tender, purifying love—a final opportunity for souls to be made ready for the joy of heaven.

### **Hell: A Real Possibility We Must Take Seriously**

Hell is not a medieval invention—it is a real and dreadful possibility. Jesus, who speaks most tenderly of God's mercy, also speaks most clearly about hell. Saint Paul echoes this:

“Whether we are living in the body or exiled from it, we are intent on pleasing him. For all the truth about us will be brought out in the law court of Christ, and each of us will get what he deserves for the things he did in the body, good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:9–10)

This is not about fear—it’s about freedom. God respects our choices. He does not force heaven upon us. Hell is the tragic possibility of a life lived in rejection of love, goodness, and truth.

### **The Final Judgement and the Second Coming**

At the end of time, Christ will return in glory. This is the **Last Judgement**, when all will be revealed and all creation will be set right.

The Catechism teaches:

“Following in the steps of the prophets and John the Baptist, Jesus announced the judgment of the Last Day in his preaching. Then will the conduct of each one and the secrets of hearts be brought to light. Then will the culpable unbelief that counted the offer of God's grace as nothing be condemned. Our attitude to our neighbour will disclose acceptance or refusal of grace and divine love.” (CCC 678)

This is not a second chance or a reversal of the particular judgement. Rather, it is the public unveiling of God’s justice and mercy. We will see how each life, each choice, each act of love or rejection rippled through creation.

## **Resurrection and Renewal**

At the Last Judgement, we will be resurrected—body and soul. This matters because we live, love, and sin as embodied beings. God's justice honours that.

“At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgement the righteous will reign forever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed.” (CCC 1047)

Heaven, hell, and purgatory are not places on a map. They are states of being—real, eternal, and deeply personal. The final judgement completes our story, revealing how our lives fit into God's great tapestry of salvation.

## **Time, Eternity, and the Mystery of Judgement**

The final judgement involves the full human person and as such is the completion of all whom we are. Since we sin and perform virtuous acts as beings made up of body and soul, it is proper that we should be judged as beings made up of body and soul.

This is where our language breaks down. We speak of “the living and the dead,” but in eternity, chronological time no longer applies. Those who die before the second coming experience the particular judgement. Those alive at Christ's return will experience the final judgement directly.

The Catechism explains:

“The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming. Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvellous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death.” (CCC 1040)

### **A Word of Comfort and Challenge**

We need not fear Christ's return. We should long for it. It is the day when all wounds are healed, all wrongs are made right, and love triumphs over death.

St John of the Cross reminds us:

“In the evening of our lives, we will be judged by love alone.”

Let us live now in that love—seeking mercy, offering forgiveness, and walking humbly with our God. The second coming is not the end—it is the beginning of the fullness of life.



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## *Judgment, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory*

What lies beyond the veil of death? In this accessible and pastoral reflection, Fr Luke explores the Church's teaching on the "last things"—those eternal realities that await each of us: particular judgment, heaven, purgatory, hell, and the final judgment at the end of time.

Far from being gloomy or fear-inducing, this booklet offers a merciful and hope-filled vision of what it means to live in light of eternity. Drawing from Scripture and Tradition, it clarifies what the Church teaches, dispels common misconceptions, and invites readers to rediscover the beauty of Christ's promise: that He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Whether you are seeking understanding, reassurance, or a deeper sense of purpose, this short reflection offers eternal truths for every pilgrim soul.

***"The Shepherd's Voice", pamphlets, booklets and devotional resources from  
Fr Luke Goymour***

**Fr Luke Goymour** was ordained to the priesthood in 2010. He completed his studies at St Mary's College, Oscott, earning a Bachelor's degree in Applied Theology with Catholic Philosophy from Birmingham University, as well as a *Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureum* (STB) in Catholic Theology from the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. Following ordination, he furthered his education at Heythrop College, obtaining a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology from the University of London. He currently serves as Parish Priest of St Mark's with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen, Ipswich. He is dedicated to teaching and preaching the gospel, with a strong commitment to helping others come to know Jesus Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Faith.