

Symbolon Summary Session 10 - The Last Things

"Remember man, you are dust, and to dust you shall return." These are the words used on Ash Wednesday to remind us all that we are going to die someday. We are not made for this world, but instead to live with God forever in heaven. Death is not a topic that many people are comfortable talking openly about, but that doesn't mean that it isn't a topic that most people are curious about. The question of, "What happens after we die?" is often one that sparks that curiosity. Evidence that early Christians believed in an after-life is found in these things: 1. the use of the word cemetery to name their burial places. The word cemetery is a hope filled word that means sleeping rooms or resting places. Christians buried there were said to be asleep in Jesus Christ awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. Death was not a final end but an entry way into eternal life. 2. The use of images to decorate their burial places such as that of the Good Shepard carrying a lamb, a dove with olive branches, anchors, and ships at sea. All of these images representing the idea that death is a birth into new life in their own respects. Jesus, the one and only authority on death says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life, whoever believes in me will have eternal life."

At the moment of our death, each of us will face what is called the Particular Judgement. This can also be thought of as a "finding". At this moment, we will recognize ourselves as who we are. We are "finding" ourselves to be the person we have made ourselves to be. We will either find ourselves to be friends of Christ and worthy of heaven, or as someone who rejected Him, and thus find ourselves worthy of hell. Hell is the absence or lack of God. Jesus does not send us to hell. In fact, He tries to prevent us from being there. No one is in hell who does not already want to be there through his/her own actions and choices. On the other hand, no one can conceive of the great joys and perfect love of heaven. There, one will be like God, and see Him as He is. This is called the Beatific Vision or the Blessed Vision of God. In heaven, one will experience ultimate human happiness, the fulfillment of every human desire, and the answer to every human question. This for eternity is heaven.

However, what happens to those who, when facing the Particular Judgement, are found to be in God's love and grace but are not yet worthy of heaven and not deserving of hell? Since we are not all like Saints, and we can tend to hold selfishly onto our sins, the Bible teaches us of a place called Purgatory. This is where one goes to be purged of the residue of sin, since nothing unclean shall enter heaven. Purgatory is where God builds us back up and prepares us for entry into heaven. As a result of this, many of us are in the practice of praying for the dead. By doing so, we are participating in God's love, and uniting ourselves with those Christians awaiting heaven to help aid them in their purification and hasten their arrival into heaven.

At the end of time, when Christ comes again, our bodies will be resurrected and all of humanity will face the Last Judgement. This is when the truth of each man's relationship with God will be made known, and the consequences of each man's actions will be revealed. Each individual will see how through all of his/her actions for good or ill God has drawn and worked love. Through the eyes of God, he/she will look at life the way God perceives it for us. It's only when we consider the decisions we make in the light of eternity that our entire lives begin to make sense and our relationship with God can come to full maturity.

Through our actions of knowing, loving and serving God in this life we are helping ourselves to live our ultimate purpose. We are pointing ourselves to our ultimate destiny, which is eternal life in heaven with God. We can come to know God through prayer. We can love God by receiving the Sacraments fervently and with true desire. We can serve God by living out our ultimate purpose. Our purpose is to be holy and blameless of life. We try to live out the reality that we are made in God's image to the

fullest extent that we can. Then we will see the world through the eyes of God, and will achieve through the grace of God, that eternal destiny.