



A Family of Faith: Volume I

April Lecture Notes

HEAVENBOUND: The Church and the Last Things

Introduction

- I. The Church on Earth
- II. The Church in Purgatory and in Heaven
- III. The End of the World
- IV. Divine Mercy Painting

Introduction

- A. Opening Questions
 - 1. How do we know the Catholic Church is the Church Jesus founded?
 - 2. What do we mean by “life everlasting”?
- B. It makes sense that at the end of the year, we should finish up by talking about the final conclusion of God’s saving plan, and of the human story
 - 1. We’ve looked at the past; now we look to the *present* and the *future*.
- C. With regard to the *present*, we’ll look at the 3-fold structure of the Church
 - 1. What is the Church on Earth like?
 - 2. What is the Church in Purgatory like?
 - 3. What is the Church in Heaven like?
(and yes, as we’ll see, those in Heaven and in Purgatory are still members of the Church!)
- D. With regard to the *future*, we’ll look at the consummation of God’s plan – the end of this life, and the eternal beginning of the next life.

I. The Church on Earth

- A. The Church on Earth is sometimes called the “Church Militant,” because we’re still fighting the good fight for Christ – still engaged in the struggle against sin and evil.
 - 1. But here’s an important question: How do we know which Church is the real Church that Jesus founded? After all, there are a lot of denominations to choose from!
 - 2. Well, the Nicene Creed gives us **Four Marks**, four characteristics, by which we can know Christ’s true Church. These marks are **One**, **Holy**, **Catholic**, and **Apostolic**

3. Also, you can see all these characteristics at the very beginning of the Church's life, at Pentecost.

B. So let's look at these four Marks

1. **One:** This means that the Church must be unified. At Pentecost we read that "They were all together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).
 - a. So which denomination has the greatest power to unify? What's the largest denomination of the largest religion in the world? What's the greatest single international organization on the planet? *The Catholic Church.*
2. **Holy:** At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit made the Church Holy through the sacraments of Baptism (Acts 2:41) and the Eucharist ("breaking the bread" in Acts 2:42,46).
 - a. So where do you see the most emphasis on the Sacraments? Who has baptized more people, and celebrated more masses, than any other group? *The Catholic Church.*
3. **Catholic** (=universal): At Pentecost, there are "men from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), and the Church preaches to each in their own language.
 - a. So in which denomination do you see the most races, ethnicities, languages? Where do you see the greatest cultural diversity and enthusiasm for evangelization? Which denomination actually has "Catholic" in its name? *The Catholic Church.*
4. **Apostolic:** At Pentecost, Peter speaks authoritatively, with the other apostles surrounding him (Acts 2:14-14).
 - a. So where do you most clearly see one man speaking authoritatively for the Church, with the successors of the apostles surrounding him? Where do you see the Pope and Bishops – the heirs of the original apostles – leading God's people? *The Catholic Church*

So what does Christ's Church look like on Earth? It looks like, it is, the Catholic Church.

II. The Church in Purgatory and Heaven

- A. On the Cross, Jesus conquered death itself – which means that death no longer has the power to divide those who remain connected to Him
 - 1. That's why we talk about the "Communion of Saints" – the community of all those who love and follow Christ – whether in this life or the next.
 - 2. How are we still connected to Christians who have gone before? Well, most importantly, we can still help them with our prayers, and they can still help us with their prayers.
- B. The Souls in Heaven ("The Church Triumphant")
 - 1. If we die in a state of grace – in a state of friendship with God – we will ultimately reach Heaven.
 - 2. This is the fulfillment of all desire – seeing God face-to-face (1 Corinthians 13:12), as He is, and realizing that He is the source of all perfection and all happiness.
 - 3. We will also enjoy the eternal, glorious company of Our Lady and all the angels and the saints.
 - 4. Here's an exercise: think of the five happiest moments of your life so far – then imagine that feeling being even more intense, and lasting forever. That'll make you want to go to Heaven.
- C. The Souls in Purgatory ("The Church Suffering")
 - 1. If we die in a state of grace and friendship with God, but we still have vices and sins that we need to be purified from, then we must spend some time in Purgatory.
 - 2. Purgatory is basically God's detox center.
 - a. We need to let go of our vanities and lusts and resentments (and just like detoxing from drugs or alcohol, it's going to be *painful*).
 - b. But our sin and vice is what makes us most miserable on earth – so if we went to heaven with our sins and vices, we wouldn't even be able to enjoy Heaven!
 - 3. So Purgatory is a mercy – when you're in Purgatory, you *know* you're going to Heaven, and you're glad God has given you an opportunity to become well, so that you can really appreciate Heaven when you get there.
 - a. But it is hard and painful to get over your issues, whether in this life or the next – and so the souls in Purgatory appreciate all the prayers they can get!

So that's the Church, in this life and the next. But how will the Church's story end?

III. The End of the World

A. Hell

1. We can't forget to mention that not necessarily everyone will choose to go to Heaven
2. Jesus has offered us forgiveness from every sin – especially in the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation – and there is no evil from which He can't heal us
3. But love must be free, and if we wish we can choose – through our evil decisions and our refusal to repent – to spend our eternity separated from God.
4. This infinite loneliness, selfishness, and isolation from God and the blessed is Hell.
 - a. It is terrifying to see what selfishness does in this life, and it's even more terrifying to think of what it could do to us in eternity. So we pray to God for the grace to be open to His love and healing.

B. The Resurrection of the Body

1. When Christ comes again in glory on the last day, all who have died will get their bodies back.
2. For those who have chosen Heaven, this means we will be able to delight in God and praise Him with our bodies as well as our souls.
3. It means we will experience the joy of Heaven with our full humanity, as God originally intended.

C. How can we *imagine* this final fulfillment of all God's designs?

1. Here, it's probably best to let Scripture have the last word:
 - a. [READ OUT LOUD Revelation 21:1-5, found in Lesson 13, **"Amen"**]
2. How incredible does that sound?
 - a. Is that not worth waiting for?
 - b. Is that not worth working towards?
3. Let's end the year with a prayer praising God for the magnificentness of His story.

- a. Let's remember, every time we say "Thy Kingdom Come," what an astonishingly beautiful end of the story we're looking forward to.
- b. And let's ask God for the grace to prepare ourselves for that fearful, glorious day.

IV. **Divine Mercy Painting**

- A. The Sunday after Easter is Divine Mercy Sunday. In 1931, Sister Faustina saw a vision of Jesus with light streaming out of His heart.
- B. He told her to have a painting made of what she saw with the words "**Jesus, I trust in You,**" and that the Sunday after Easter should be devoted to His mercy.
- C. He taught her a prayer called **The Divine Mercy Chaplet**.
- D. As a family, pray a Divine Mercy Chaplet using rosary beads:
 1. Begin with the Sign of the Cross. Then say the Our Father, a Hail Mary, and the Apostles' Creed.
 2. On the Our Father beads, pray: Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.
 3. On each of the 10 Hail Mary beads, pray: For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world. (Repeat steps 2 and 3 for all five decades.)
 4. Conclude by praying three times: Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

Discussion

- A. Begin with a prayer, and then let parents know that, since this is the last content-focused adult meeting, you will follow a slightly different structure today. The teaching this month explores more deeply some concepts you have already studied: the forgiveness of sins, the Communion of Saints, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Before you lecture, give an index card to each couple and ask parents to write the following:
 - a. Any questions they have about these topics or any others covered this year
 - b. What they found most interesting this year
- B. Then collect the cards.
The person who will be leading the discussion should review the cards and select a few to discuss with the large group.

Reminders and Announcements

- A. The next Community Meeting picnic will take place at **[location]** on **[date]**.
Provide information for your parish

Living the Faith At Home

- A. Put up the **April Fridge Page** and the **Car Conversations hang tag**.
- B. Choose the activities that will work best for your family. For example, some children may prefer reading and discussion, while others might prefer crafts.
- *You are not required to do all the activities in the book.*
- C. Your children will learn the Faith from your witness as parents better than through any structured activity.
1. Fridge page and car conversations can be found in their Parent's Guide at the beginning of this month's lesson.
 2. This program is first and foremost about their own formation, and secondarily about helping them teach their children. "Put your own mask on first," as they say!

Key Points in Our Reading This Month

- A. The Church has four marks: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.
- B. The Church is one because she is unified in her origin, teaching, and governance.
- C. The Church is holy because her founder and her mission are holy.
- D. The Church is catholic in the sense of being universal: whole and complete.
- E. The Church is apostolic because Christ founded the Church on the Apostles and governs her through their successors, the bishops.
- F. All the faithful - those in Heaven, in purgatory, and believers on earth - form one body.

Closing Prayer

- A. Close by praying a decade of the Divine Mercy Chaplet (or the whole Chaplet).
1. Offer your families encouragement as they complete their Storybooks and prepare to bring them in for the Community Meeting.