

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN

(Catechism nn. 1020-1065)

Life everlasting (Catechism n. 1020-1060)

The final declaration of the Creed is 'I believe in life everlasting'. The Catechism (n. 1020) quotes from the Prayer of Commendation in the Funeral Rite:

'Go forth Christian soul from this world in the name of God the Almighty Father who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit who was poured out upon you, Go forth faithful Christian! May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God, with Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, with Joseph and all the angels and saints ... May you return to your Creator who formed you from the dust of the earth. May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints come to meet you as you go forth from this life ... May you see your Redeemer face to face.'

The Catechism (n. 1021-1022) goes on to speak about the personal judgment that each of us faces at the moment of death. In an earlier section (n. 1011), it quoted the following from Saint John of the Cross: 'At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.'

It then speaks of heaven (n. 1023-1029). Heaven is being in communion with God, a communion that nothing can interrupt. Saint Augustine wrote:

'You have made us for yourself, O God. And our hearts are restless till they rest in You'(Confessions I.1)..

Heaven is this resting in the communion of love received and love given, a communion that fills our being and totally satisfies our hearts. It is an infinite growing in love as we are drawn into communion with the Mystery that is God, a communion that embraces everything that God loves.

We reflected briefly on purgatory in Chapter 17. The Catechism (n.1030 and 1032) writes:

'All who die in God's grace and friendship, but who are still imperfectly purified, are assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.'

The Church commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead. Here again this is based on the mystery of the inter-connectedness of all things in this emerging universe.

The Catechism goes on to speak of hell (n. 1033-1037):

'To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from God forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell" (n. 1033).

'The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone we can possess the life and happiness for which we are created and for which we long' (n. 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' (n. 1037).

In a General Audience on 28th July 1999, Pope John-Paul II said:

‘Rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy ... Damnation consists precisely in definitive separation from God, freely chosen by the human person and confirmed with death that seals his choice forever. God’s judgment ratifies this state.’

The Catechism speaks of the ‘last’ judgment (n. 1038-1041). Is this saying any more than that everything (all people, all time and all history) comes under the judgment of God? We cannot wish away the effects of what we do. Everything matters.

Finally, the Catechism (n. 1042-1050) reflects on our hope of a new heaven and a new earth, when creation attains the goal which God always intended, when the kingdom of God is established and there is no sin.

Amen (Catechism n. 1061-1065)

‘Amen’ is a Hebrew word from the same root as the word for ‘Faithfulness’. It is an acknowledgment of the faithfulness of God and an assertion that we place our trust in what has been said: ‘The Creed’s final “Amen” repeats and confirms its first words: “I believe”. To believe is to say “Amen” to God’s words, promises and commandments; to entrust oneself completely to him who is the ‘Amen’ of infinite love and perfect faithfulness. The Christian’s everyday life will then be the “Amen” to the “I believe” of our baptismal profession of faith’ (n. 1064).

Paul reminds us:

‘Jesus Christ himself is the “Amen” ... For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him to the glory of God’ (2Corinthians 1:20; Catechism n. 1065).