

**Editor's Note:** The word "death" is capitalized and bolded by the author, even within quotes, for effect.

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## First Sunday in Lent

*In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*

For the glory of God and for the salvation of souls, the theme of "**The Four Last Things**" is a traditional meditation in our One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Four Last Things are: **Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell**. During this first week of Lent, we will reflect upon **DEATH**.

We will begin our reflections with **DEATH**. We will end our lives with **DEATH**. At the moment of **DEATH**, we will be judged and then sent to Heaven or Hell for all eternity, with a temporary stay in Purgatory for some people on their way to their ultimate reward in Heaven.

One of the most memorable places that I ever visited in Rome is the church of *Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini* (Our Lady of the Conception of the Capuchins) located on the Via Veneto, close to the Piazza Barberini. This church was built upon the occasion of the Capuchins having been relocated from another section of Rome to make way for a civil construction project. This also involved moving all the graves from the old cemetery to this new location. The hundreds and hundreds of human remains were then placed in the [crypt area](#) of the new church and artistically arranged therein (pictured above). Some of the skeletons are intact and draped with Capuchin Franciscan habits. For the most part, skulls and other bones are arranged in elaborate ornamental designs. The crypt is open to the public and is a major tourist attraction. A plaque above the entrance to the crypt reads in three languages: "**What you are now, we once were. What we are now, you shall be.**" This is a reminder of **DEATH**, lest we think that we shall live forever.

In the early centuries, an educated man might often place a skull on his desk to keep the idea of **DEATH** always present in his mind. This is called a "[Memento mori](#)", which literally means, "Remember **DEATH**" or, in other words, "**Remember you must die.**" In addition to a collection of holy cards from the funerals of various friends and relatives, I have a business card from the Amigone Funeral Home from Buffalo, New York on my dresser that I see every morning and night. The name can be seen as 'Am-I -gone?' - a reminder of the untimely deaths of Fr. Nicholas Gruner, founder of The Fatima Center, and John Vennari, the former editor of *Catholic Family News*, whose souls I prayed for at this establishment

not that long ago (*requiescant in pace*).[\[1\]](#) None of us knows when our time will come.

We will be judged immediately after **DEATH**. The ultimate judgment is Heaven or Hell for all eternity. We must therefore be prepared for **DEATH** at every moment, for we do not know when our **DEATH** will be. Some people die a gradual natural **DEATH** and some people meet a sudden tragic **DEATH**. In either case, final judgment occurs at the moment of **DEATH**. We *must* be prepared. We need to be in a state of grace at all times, lest we risk dying with the stain of mortal sin on our soul and going into the fires of Hell for all eternity. We *need* the Sacrament of Confession.

## Fatima

The Message of Fatima is a compendium of Catholic teaching and a reaffirmation of the Gospel. The Message of Fatima is an answer to our troubled times of doctrinal confusion. The Fatima Message affirms the traditional teaching of our One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, which is being denied today. Fatima teaches us of death and the need for the Sacrament of Confession.

On June 13, 1917, Lucia dos Santos [said](#) to Our Lady: “I would like to ask you to take us to Heaven.” Of her cousins, Jacinta Marto and her brother Francisco, aged seven and eight, respectively, the Virgin Mother responded: “Yes, I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon.” As for the 10-year-old Lucia, Our Lady said: “But you are to stay here some time longer.” Our Lady explained that “Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved.” Jacinta was nine years old when she died and her brother, Francisco, was only 10—both victims to the Spanish Influenza epidemic that had swept through Portugal. Lucia would become a religious sister and live on for many more years.

This reminds us that Almighty God has plans for all of us, including **DEATH**—for some, sooner rather than later. As long as we are alive, we have a vocation and a mission from God. How well we fulfill God’s plan for our lives will determine whether or not we make it to Heaven.

As Francisco was on his **DEATH**-bed, he examined his conscience in order to make a good Confession. In doing so, he asked Lucia to tell him what sins that she saw him commit. He then asked Lucia to go to the bedside of his dying sister, Jacinta, to ask her what sins that she saw him commit. Having gone through all this, so as to not miss any sins, Francisco made a good Confession to the priest and died soon thereafter, having prepared himself for **DEATH**.

It is a *very sad* thing to talk to some people who never go to Confession. Shockingly, they

often say: **“I have no sins.”** If they had been alive at the time when Jesus said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,” then the women caught in adultery would have been pummeled with rocks (John 8:1-11). If you are one of those who think that you are without sin, I invite you, in imitation of Francisco, to ask your family and friends to tell you what sins that they saw you commit.

One beautiful attribute of the Sanctuary at Fatima is that at the time of my most recent pilgrimage, in 2017, there were several chapels containing a total of 44 confessionals, although not all are necessarily in use at any given time. There is an electronic monitoring screen which lists the confessional number, the priest’s name, and the languages that he speaks. I went to Confession here and found that the penitent had the option of going behind the screen or ‘face to face.’ There were a considerable number of penitents and a good number of priest-confessors available. Francisco would have been pleased.

## Traditional Catholic Teaching

The traditional **1891 Baltimore Catechism (#3)**, [“Lesson 1, On the End of Man”](#), teaches the following [with my comments in brackets]:

### **Q. 126. What do we mean by the “end of man”?**

A. By the “end of man” we mean the purpose for which he was created: namely, to know, love, and serve God. [We were *not* created simply to live and die.]

### **Q. 133. What is man?**

A. Man is a creature composed of body and soul, and made to the image and likeness of God. [At the **DEATH** of the body, the immortal soul separates from the body.]

### **Q. 136. Is this likeness in the body or in the soul?**

A. This likeness is chiefly in the soul.

### **Q. 137. How is the soul like to God?**

A. The soul is like to God because it is a spirit that will never die, and has understanding and free will.

### **Q. 140. What do the words “will never die” mean?**

A. By the words “will never die” we mean that the soul, when once created, will never cease to exist, whatever be its condition in the next world. Hence, we say the soul is immortal or gifted with immortality.

### **Q. 141. Why then do we say a soul is dead while in a state of mortal sin?**

A. We say a soul is dead while in a state of mortal sin because, in that state, it is as helpless as a dead body, and can merit nothing for itself.

**Q. 150. Why did God make you?**

A. God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next. [If a person does not know, love, and serve God in this world, that person cannot expect to be happy forever with God in the life of the world to come.]

**Q. 152. Of which must we take more care, our soul or our body?**

A. We must take more care of our soul than of our body.

[Many people today take care of their bodies with diets, exercise, vitamins, wearing nice clothes, etc. – which may not necessarily be wrong, and may be good. However, we should be *much* more concerned with taking care of our souls with prayer (especially the Rosary), fasting, going to Confession regularly, receiving Holy Communion in a state of grace, wearing the Brown Scapular, etc. The spiritual exercises that we concentrate on during Lent should be a part of our lives throughout the year.]

**Q. 153. Why must we take more care of our soul than of our body?**

A. We must take more care of our soul than of our body because in losing our soul we lose God and everlasting happiness.

**Q. 154. What must we do to save our souls?**

A. To save our souls, we must worship God by faith, hope, and charity; that is, we must believe in Him, hope in Him, and love Him with all our heart.

The traditional **1891 Baltimore Catechism (#3)**, "[Lesson 19, On Confession](#)", has excellent teaching on how to make a good Confession, as well as directions on how to make a traditional penitential Lent. (See also, "[Lesson 20, On the Manner of Making a Good Confession](#)", for further assistance.)

## Sacred Scripture

From the traditional **Douay-Rheims Bible** [with my comments in brackets]:

"Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (Jn 20:23). [Here, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, instituted the Sacrament of Confession. "A Sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." – 1891 Baltimore Catechism (#3), "[Lesson 13, On the Sacraments in General](#)"]

“Amen I say to you, there are some of them that stand here that shall not taste **DEATH**, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). [The Second Coming of Christ and the General Judgment may come before we die.]

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall put you to **DEATH**: and you shall be hated by all nations for My Name’s sake” (Matt. 24:9; Mark 8:39). [We may someday be called to be martyrs for Christ.]

“Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin **DEATH**; and so **DEATH** passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). [Through the Original Sin of Adam/Eve, sin and **DEATH** entered the world. All are sinners.]

“That as sin hath reigned to **DEATH**, so also grace might reign by justice unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21). [For our salvation, sin and **DEATH** were conquered on the Cross by the ‘new Adam,’ our Lord and God, Jesus Christ.]

“And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

## Saints

**St. Augustine:** “Take care of your body as if you were going to live forever; and take care of your soul as if you were going to die tomorrow.”

**Padre Pio**, a Capuchin priest, could actually smell the stench of sin on people who were not in a state of grace. When people went to Confession to Padre Pio, he would tell them the details of whatever sin that they forgot to confess or of whatever sin they tried to hide. Once a woman came to Confession to Padre Pio, told him her sins, and he refused to give her absolution. Rather, he told her to go out to the water well just outside the friary and to look down into the water, then come back and tell him what she saw. She did as she was told, came back, and related that she saw a young man dressed in a white cassock, surrounded by happy children. Pio told her that that young man dressed in white was her aborted son, who would have grown up to be a great pope. The woman then confessed her hidden sin of abortion and was then given absolution by Padre Pio.

**St. Augustine:** “Christ’s martyrs feared neither **DEATH** nor pain. He triumphed in them who lived in them; and they, who lived not for themselves but for Him, found in **DEATH** itself the way to life.”

**St. Alphonsus Liguori:** “The true love for the body consists in treating it here with rigor and contempt, that it may be happy for eternity; and in refusing it all pleasures which might

make it miserable forever...”

**St. Bonaventure:** “...to lead a good life a man should always imagine himself at the hour of **DEATH**.”

## Conclusion

Society and many within the modern Church have lost their sense of sin. Fifty years ago, the lines for Confessions were long. Today, it seems, only a small percentage of those who consider themselves Catholic go to Confession. Preparation for **DEATH** involves making regular Confessions, for the forgiveness of our sins, for we do not know when we will die.

**Good St. Joseph** is considered to be the [Patron Saint of a Happy Death](#), because he was with Jesus and Mary at the time of his holy **DEATH**. Pray to St. Joseph, that you will be prepared for **DEATH** by being in a state of grace when you die. Your eternal salvation depends on it—Heaven or Hell *for all eternity* depends on it.

Every year, Holy Mother Church gives us forty days of Lent to prepare for our **DEATH**. Prepare wisely, my friends. Firmly resolve, with the help of God’s grace, to confess your sins, to do penance, and to amend your life.

*In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*

*This article has been updated since the time of publication.*

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[1] Fr. Ladis J. Cizik, “Glorious Mystery Meditations: Remembering Father Nicholas Gruner in the Light of the Miracle of the Sun,” *Catholic Family News*, June 2015 issue; Fr. Ladis J. Cizik, “John Vennari’s Funeral Home Rosary,” *Catholic Family News*, May 2017 issue.