

## **Life after death**

Christians believe there is an afterlife. Although the body dies and is buried or cremated, they believe that their unique soul lives on and is raised to new life by God.

Their belief that Jesus rose from the dead three days after his crucifixion (a Roman method of execution) gives Christians hope that if they follow Jesus' teaching and accept him as their Lord and Saviour, then this new resurrection life awaits them. By being born as a human being (the incarnation), and then dying on the cross, Jesus made this new 'life after death' possible for all.

**Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.' John 11:25-26**

**God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16**

## **Heaven, hell and purgatory**

Christians believe that God is just and fair, and so cannot let evil go unpunished. Most believe in the idea of judgement after death, and that God will treat people in the afterlife according to how they lived their life on earth.

Although heaven is often mentioned in the Bible, it is rarely described. Christians therefore have very different ideas about it. Some believe that heaven is a physical place, where their body goes after death. Others believe that it is their soul that lives on, and that heaven is a state of being united with God.

The Bible is even less specific about hell, and Christians have very different ideas about this too. Some Christians believe that hell is a place of suffering, and of separation from God. Others (perhaps most) believe that hell is a spiritual state of being separated from God for eternity. Some Christians, including Roman Catholics, believe in purgatory. This is an in-between state for the majority of people of waiting for heaven, a time of cleansing from sin and preparing for heaven.

Christians believe in the Second Coming (Parousia) - the anticipated return of Jesus Christ from heaven to earth. This will herald the general resurrection of the dead, the last judgement of the dead and the living, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

## Christian/Catholic belief about the nature of death

- Life has a limited time span.
- Death is at the end of earthly life.
- At death the body and soul separate.
- At death the physical body dies when the biological life processes cease. This can be sudden or gradual.
- The soul lives on after death.
- We come from God and return to God.

## The Apostles Creed

This belief statement gives us evidence of what the Catholic Church believes about life after death.

Statement	Meaning
Jesus died and was buried	Jesus death was physical.
Jesus descended to the dead	Jesus experienced death completely and went to the place of the dead
Jesus rose from the dead	Jesus' returned from the place of the dead. His physical body came back to life again – demonstrating victory over death
He ascended into heaven	Heaven is a place where God is. It is a place where those who have died may go.
Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead	There will be a judgement day when Jesus returns at the end of time
..... in the resurrection of the body	A Christian will experience a bodily resurrection at the end of time
.....And the life everlasting	A Christian will experience eternal life after death

**The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:**

*By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has 'opened heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ. (CCC 1026)*

While the concept of heaven was revealed to us through Christ's teachings that are presented in Holy Scripture, the New Testament also 'repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith.' (CCC 1021) The Catechism elaborates as follows: *Every man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven –through a purification [in purgatory] or immediately, -or immediate and everlasting damnation [in Hell]. (CCC 1022)*

In other words, Christ not only lived his life here on earth as a model for each of us but he also forged for us a way to eternal life with him in heaven. Given that each one of us has been given the gift of free choice, we can freely choose to be united with Him in heaven or to be separated from Him forever in hell. As well, some will be assured of heaven but will need purification beforehand.

**References to Life After Death in the Mass**

Opening Prayer

Penitential Rite

Profession of Faith: Nicene Creed

Eucharistic Prayer

- Commemoration of the dead
- Acclamation of faith

Communion Rite

- Breaking of bread
- Communion

The Mass is a memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection.