

Pastor's Pen: 4 last Things

Heaven, hell, judgement, and purgatory are considered the four last things in the Church. Most Catholics would be hard pressed to know this anymore. It is not because the Church officially changed her teachings. It is not because Scripture passages that refer to these things have been removed. It is because they have largely been absent in preaching and teaching. After all, we don't want people to feel bad! Right?

No Penalty, No Crime

We know from human experience that when we take away the penalty from something, we only encourage the behavior. Think about it. If you were able to eat absolutely anything and it would have no negative experience to your health, might you eat healthily? Were you unable to be physically hurt, would you not be more reckless and thrill seeking? We see this with children. They don't understand the concept of cause and effect. They don't immediately get that touching the hot burner will hurt badly. They don't understand that eating the poisonous plant might kill them. Adults have to teach them this principle of cause and effect. Remove this and the child becomes at risk for a great many dangers.

If we are responsible adults, we teach them there are consequences for their actions. Effort or lack of effort does change outcome. If they want to be a star athlete then there are things they must do and must avoid doing. If they want to master an instrument, there are things they must do and must avoid doing. If they wish to get good grades, there are things they must do and must avoid doing. Responsible adults also teach lessons to their children about financial stability, courtship and marriage, politics, and other avenues we must travel in the world. When responsibility is skirted, it is not to the good of the child. In fact, a sense of entitlement sets in which thwarts the good of the child.

Within the Church the heresy of universalism has become prevalent. Universalism basically teaches that all people go to heaven. Some universalists might see purgatory as the great equalizer: sin a little and you spend a little time there, sin a great deal and you spend longer. So evil men like Hitler still get punished, but still eventually get in to heaven. Honestly, most universalists don't even believe in purgatory. For them, God's mercy is so powerful that it overwhelms the will and consequences of even the most grave sinner.

This is the golden ticket, no? No matter what you do, you end up in heaven! Your beliefs and practice of those beliefs are totally irrelevant to your eternal outcome! If that is the case, then morality is mere human construct that God is disinterested in. Want to engage sexually with whatever you want whenever you want? Then it is merely a matter of changing civil laws! In this

world legal=moral. This was the thinking behind the Final Solution in Nazi Germany. This was the thinking that permitted chattel slavery. This is the thinking that is the philosophical underpinnings of life issues from abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and now even infanticide.

Escaping Fantasyland

However we know life isn't like that. The principle of cause and effect don't go away. Being financially irresponsible does have consequences. Not studying has consequences. Eating poorly and not exercising has consequences. Risky behavior still carries consequences. St. Paul VI said in *Humanae Vitae* that there would be grave consequences for the contraceptive mentality. There have been grave consequences. We are coming to those conclusions as a society. Following your passions is well and good until those passions have no market value and you are up to your neck in debt. Engaging in criminal behavior has consequences. Life is cruel like that.

Universalism does not follow reality or Scripture. If our moral choices bear consequence in this world, how can we sanely think they won't in God's eyes? Furthermore, would not a loving God actually tell you the criteria and consequences? Fortunately our God does. He helps us to find the door out of this hellish fantasyland where actions have no consequences.

Our God does tell us that there is either eternal life or eternal damnation. He does tell us we must be purged of the consequences of our sins. He does give us what constitutes a life pleasing to Him. Since it is His home, so to speak, He gets to tell who comes in and who doesn't.

A Hellish Heaven

One of the problems with universalism is its view of heaven. We hear it all the time. Oh, dad died, and now he can spend eternity fishing. Or mom can spend eternity knitting. Heaven becomes about self-indulgence. Heaven is about an eternal relationship with God; God doesn't just happen to be another resident of heaven. If heaven is about eternally sating me with what makes me happy, then it is not heaven at all. If heaven is eternal grouping of self-centered people, then it is not heaven but hell. Universalism adds a horrible twist to the afterlife: Not "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" but "My will be done on heaven as on earth!"

It does go to the point, though, that we will carry on the relationship or lack thereof we have with God now into eternity. If my world circles around me now, it will circle around me for eternity. If God is the center of my life now, He will be for eternity as well.

Now that I have said what heaven isn't, next week I will summarize what exactly we do believe about the last four things.