
“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

b) The urgency of examination and confession

According to the description Jesus has given, it is not hard to verify if I am on the way to Heaven or not.

Do I live for GOD and for His sons and daughters, giving what I can? Am I confident in His solicitous love for me, so that I really forget myself and care for others? Do I speak the truth, whether it is “convenient or inconvenient”? Am I heedful to the modest requests of a humble parishioner or do they have to face a bureaucratic labyrinth in order to be attended by me? There are, of course, unpleasant duties in our priestly ministry, and how do I handle them? Am I ready to get up at in the middle of the night to attend to a dying soul? Am I willing to listen to the same confession of the same person a hundred times – still willingly, patiently? How far..., when do we start to complain?

Are my excuses sincere? Are my acts of repentance in my own confessions sincere so that I actually advance to a real amendment of life? Do I suffer from the illusion that I have already done enough for Jesus, for souls?

4. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

Bl. John Paul II pastorally recalls: “The thought of hell — and even less the improper use of biblical images — must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom within the proclamation that the risen Jesus has conquered Satan, giving us the Spirit of God who makes us cry ‘Abba, Father!’ (Rm 8:15; Gal 4:6).” (JP II, Aud.) We know there are two ways to convert and draw souls closer to God, one is by love, the other by victimhood along the way of the cross and suffering. Are we conscious that by our very priesthood we are called to walk both paths, much like the liturgy of the word is inseparably linked to the liturgy of the eucharist?

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CHRIST’S PRIESTS UNITED WITH THE HOLY ANGELS IN THE CHURCH

“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”



**Association of Priests
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“Depart...into the eternal fire prepared for the devil” (Mt 25,41).

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Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

In Matthew’s description of the Last Judgment we also find a reference to the fallen angels; Jesus speaks of “the devil and his angels.” The decision about the eternity with or without God is made by each rational creature, angels and men (cf., CCC 311). Every man has to “freely choose to love [God]. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves” (CCC 1033). To help us understand the importance of our daily life “our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren (cf. Mt 25:31-46)” (CCC 1033).

“And the King will ... say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink.’” (Mt 25:40-42).

He explains:

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.” (Mt 25:45)

Consequently, as the Church says: “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice.” (ibid.) “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life’.” (Mt 25:46). The “state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell’.” (CCC 1033)

1. Hell is a fact – Jesus tells us.

What the Church wants to say here with Jesus, translated into practical life, is this: souls who fail to live here on earth a life in harmony with God, which manifests itself in lovingly sharing and giving to those in need, shall also not share His life in the eternal glory of Heaven.

a) “Damnation remains a real possibility”

The goal towards which all move is clearly determined. Blessed John Paul II explained the real possibility of ‘failing’ the last Judgment with these words:

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“God is the infinitely good and merciful Father. But man, called to respond to him freely, can unfortunately choose to reject his love and forgiveness once and for all, thus separating himself for ever from joyful communion with him.” (John Paul II, July 28, 1999) The reality of such an option was already existentially concretized by the angels who fell:

The Pope recalled “the risk of saying ‘no’,” and that “some have already said ‘no’. They are the spiritual creatures that rebelled against God’s love and are called demons (cf. *Fourth Lateran Council*, DS 800-801). What happened to them is a warning to us: it is a continuous call to avoid the tragedy which leads to sin ... Damnation remains a real possibility” (Ibid.; cf. CCC 1033-1039; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Life everlasting*, 97-143; S. Hahn, *Hell*, Light-House).

b) Sacred Scripture describes

John Paul II analyzed the Old and New Testament with respect to this danger: “To describe this reality [that is “eternal damnation or hell”] Sacred Scripture uses a symbolical language like speaking of ‘a land of darkness’ (cf. *Ez* 28:8; 31:14; *Jb* 10:21f.; 38:17; *Ps* 30:10; 88:7, 13), a pit from which one cannot reascend (cf. *Jb* 7:9), a place in which it is impossible to praise God (cf. *Is* 38:18; *Ps* 6:6). ... The New Testament presents the place destined for evildoers as a fiery furnace, where people will ‘weep and gnash their teeth’ (*Mt* 13:42; cf. 25:30, 41), or like Gehenna with its ‘unquenchable fire’ (*Mk* 9:43)... a place of eternal suffering, with no possibility of return, nor of the alleviation of pain (cf. *Lk* 16:19-31). ... a ‘pool of fire’ ... a ‘second death’ (*Rv* 20:13f.)... ‘eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might’ (*2 Thes* 1:9).”

2. Hell – what can it be like?

Jesus did not hesitate to speak clearly about hell. And what do we think? Some would have us believe hell too cruel a reality for Our Lady, to have given little children at Fátima (Francisco, Jacinta and Lucy) a vision of hell. Others play down the dreadful reality of hell, supposing it either not to be so bad or supposing that “no one really goes there anyway”. Such an attitude scarcely serves as motivation to avoid sin.

a) A foreshadowing on earth

While people joke about Esau who “sold his birthright to Jacob” for a “bread and pottage of lentils” (Gen 25:33f), we would be horrified about the irresponsibility of the civil authorities if they failed to adequately post and warn drivers about a bridge that had been washed out. How about ourselves? Do we adequately warn people about the danger of sin and the real possibility of falling into the punishments of hell forever? Every suffering in this life, however grave, can be borne with a spirit of holy resignation, with the hope of final exoneration and reward. But there are no redeeming features about the prospect of hell; there is only pain and hatred. And there are no innocent sufferers there; each and every damned, angels and human, freely chose their horrible destiny!

“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

It is, indeed, a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). We read in the *Catechism*: “The greater the height, the harder the fall” (CCC 2733). To whom more has been given more will be required. How urgent it is, then, for us to pray for our fellow priests, who having fallen prey to the allurements of the world, of ambition, or perhaps, even bitterness, and so are in danger of losing their souls.

b) The terror of eternal loss

In hell the damned are separated from God; there the loss of God is certainly the worst pain: a state of total abandonment and utter frustration and depression. There are no talents, no consolations in hell; they have lost everything. They are banished forever from the Church Triumphant: Instead of uniting with the Saints in Heaven (‘*Communicantes*... - In communion with...’), they hear the ‘*Discede* – Away, depart’ from here, depart from happiness, friendship, rest and peace. In Dante’s *Inferno* there is inscribed over the gate: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!” Instead of the company of loving saints, company in hell – if one may speak of such – is that of the devils and the other damned, all fully manifest in their intensely perverse self-love and hatred. St. John Chrysostom wisely recommends: “Let us not shun sermons on hell, so that we may escape hell; let us not shun the mention of punishment, so that we may not be punished” (St. John Chrysostom, *In Ep. II ad Thess.*, Hom. 2,4).

3. Hell - is it a risk for me or can I avoid it?

It was not without reason that the former rite of ordination foresaw the final exhortation that we should live so that neither the ordaining bishop nor the ordained priest might go to hell on account of this ordination. In any case, even today the Church has the priest pray in the first Eucharistic Prayer: “command that we be delivered from eternal damnation and counted among the flock of those you have chosen”.

a) Priestly service

Vatican II observed: “Priests who perform their duties sincerely and indefatigably in the Spirit of Christ arrive at holiness by this very fact.” (*Presb.Ord.*, 13) The reason for this lies in the fact that the priestly ministry directs the priest’s whole life towards God and man, and so does not leave much space for his “Self”. The decisive distinction from Christ’s discourse on judgment is exactly present: “You gave to me” – or: “you gave me not”. This distinguished the good from the fallen angels, between those ministering spirits of divine help and the adversaries of salvation. Priests are the serving ministers in the New Testament; they are closely allied to the heavenly servants (cf. Rev 19:10; 22:9). Their lives are also, similar to that of the holy angels, a life of undivided, unconditional service. Christ’ words shall be verified in them: “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear” (Mt 13,43).