

Preparation for Life after Death

No other church, religion, or denomination prepares us better for death and life after death. The Catholic Church offers us the Eucharist—the Body and Blood of Christ—available to us throughout our lives when we are in the state of grace. We also have the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

The Eucharist and this holy oil are available to us in a special way when we are dying. They are sometimes called "Last Rites." The Eucharist is given with a special prayer that is called Viaticum. As the Body of Christ is offered, the minister says: "Jesus Christ is the food for our journey; he calls us to the heavenly table." Immediately after giving communion, the minister adds: "May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life."

With the "last anointing," the Apostolic Pardon is usually given. One of two prayers is said by the priest or bishop. The first is: "Through the holy mysteries of our redemption, may almighty God release you from all punishment in this life and in the life to come. May he open to you the gates of paradise and welcome you to everlasting joy." The second: "by the authority which the Apostolic See has given me, I grant you a full pardon and the remission of all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

During our earthly life, the Church offers many other spiritual and pastoral resources to help us deal with the reality of death and to prepare for our own death.

"Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' (Phil 1:21) 'The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we will also live with him.' (2 Tim 2:11) What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already 'died with Christ' sacramentally, in order to live a new life. . ." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1010)

"In death, God calls man to himself." Thus St. Therese of Lisieux can say: "I am not dying; I am entering life." (1011) "Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage." The Letter to the Hebrews tells us: "It is appointed for men to die once." (Heb 9:27) "There is no 'reincarnation' after death." (1013)

"The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death. In the ancient litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: 'From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord'; to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us 'at the hour of our death' in the *Hail Mary*, and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death." (1014)

In recent weeks, several famous and prominent individuals have died sudden and untimely deaths. When we reflect on death, we realize that the vast majority of the time people die the way that they lived. People who are risk takers often die due to risky behavior. People who don't face their problems—and try to numb their pain—often die of overdoses or simply "fade away" from the effects of sadness and depression on their body, mind, and soul. Others die courageously such as the martyrs and other heroes. And some die happy deaths after happy lives.

St. John of the Cross writes: "At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love." (1022) The funeral liturgy reminds us: "Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven." (1012) The *Catechism* summarizes: "By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul. Just as Christ is risen and lives forever, so all of us will rise at the last day." (1016)