



“Where am I going?”

(A Look at the Four Last Things)



Opening Prayer

“Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

May the souls of the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God,
rest in peace. Amen.”

Dive In: The Way of the Bow

Kyudo (“the way of the bow”) is Japan’s oldest martial art form. Long before the samurai met in fields of battle with their swords, and before ninjas loaded themselves with spikes and stars to scale castle walls, Japanese warriors regarded this eastern form of archery as their “weapon of choice.”

Through the centuries, as the gun replaced the bow-and-arrow on the battlefield, kyudo evolved into a highly ritualized art form that can be summarized in a single word: “focus.”

From the beginning to the end of the kyudo ritual, the archer’s eyes never leave his target. Birds fly, children cry, squirrels jump in the way, yet his concentration is absolute. Everything from the costume he wears to the way he draws the bow is designed to attain excellence in truth, goodness, and beauty.*

This emphasis on focus as a means to attain excellence extends not only to martial arts and to all sports, but

to life as well. The cheering crowds, aching muscles, and trash-talking opponents—any or all of these things can cause a person to get distracted. Your attention has to remain on that basket, goal, end zone, or target. If you’re not focused there, you have no chance of winning the game!

Life has a goal. It has an end zone. It has a target. And, in life, as in kyudo, the only way to attain our goal—to be with God forever in heaven—is to stay focused on our target and to pursue truth, beauty, and goodness (which are glimpses of heaven ... and of God) here and now. Otherwise, we end up meandering through life from one activity to the next, aiming our hearts at one wrong target after another. And, if we live for all the wrong things, we might end up losing at the “game” of life itself.

We’re going to talk today about what the end goal of life is, how to stay focused on it in a healthy way, and how that end goal impacts us in the here and now.

* This is an example of how we, as Catholics, affirm that which is good and true in other traditions, while holding fast to the revealed faith given by God through Christ and the Church. (See *Nostra Aetate* [“In Our Age”], 2.)



**“Do not lose courage
in considering your
own imperfections,
but instantly set about
remedying them.”**

— St. Francis de Sales



Segment 1: Death and Judgment

1. **T or F?** It was due to man's sin that death entered the world.
2. What aggressive animal did Chris claim to have to kill and turn into a pelt?
A) Lion B) Camel C) Squirrel D) Panda
3. Chris says that justice necessitates _____.
A) revenge B) judgment C) a trial D) anger

Segment 2: Heaven and Hell

1. **T or F?** Jesus taught about the reality of hell.
2. The *Catechism* calls heaven the state of "supreme, definitive _____."

Segment 3: Purgatory

1. **T or F?** Purgatory is a state for those who need to be purified before they enter heaven.
2. What was the penance that the priest gave Chris?



TO THE HEART with

About ten years ago, on Christmas Day, I had just opened my wife's gift to me—my own little incense burner (I love the smell!)—when a bad feeling hit me. I wondered if I was having a heart attack. “I think I need to go to the hospital,” I said.

We arrived at the hospital within minutes. As I gave my symptoms to the nursing staff, part of me wondered if I was overreacting. Did I really need a doctor? The other part of me already knew that the moment I had been dreading had finally arrived.

I was born with a partially closed aortic valve, and the doctors had told me that one day it would give out. I had annual checkups, and I didn't play competitive sports (since it might mean “sudden death”). Eventually, death would come for me—of that I was certain.

After a few hours in the hospital, I started to feel a bit better, so my wife, Linda, went home, since we were having guests for Christmas dinner. I was napping when the doctor walked into my room and told me I had to have surgery. My valve had shrunk and was leaking. “If we don't operate, within three months to a year, you'll be dead.”

A priest gave me the **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**. Linda stayed with me until, they rolled me into surgery. I remember thinking: *I have put my whole life in your hands, Jesus. I trust in you, and I trust you will take care of my family.* As the drugs caused me to start slipping away, I thought: *Well, this is it, God. I believe in you!*

It was a sobering moment. It made me sad to think that my life might be over, that I might not be able

to watch the kids grow up and get married. But I knew I was in the hands of Jesus.

You probably have already guessed that I didn't die on the operating table. More than ten years have passed. I don't know how much time I have left, or whether the new heart valve will ever give out. What I do know is that every day is a gift to embrace.

Not everyone goes through life with a faulty heart valve, but we all are going to die at some point,

possibly without any warning. And I didn't share this to encourage you to live your life in fear, but the opposite ... to encourage you to live with the freedom that comes from knowing you're right with God and with the knowledge that he loves you more than you can imagine. So, live your life in a way that will allow you to have no regrets in your relationships with others and no regrets when you finally see your Father in heaven. That's a life lived to the full, every day!

Chris Padgett

Find It!

Who is the patron saint of priests?

“... live with the freedom that comes from knowing you're right with God and ... that he loves you more than you can imagine.”

Hero of the Week



Born:

circa 256

Died:

circa 288

Memorial:

January 20

Patron Saint of:

- soldiers
- archers
- holy Christian death
- athletes

St. Sebastian Martyr

St. Sebastian is a model of a saintly superhero.

He had joined the ranks of the Roman army in order to assist Christians without arousing suspicion. He served as a captain of the Praetorian Guard for Emperor Diocletian ... until he was exposed as a Christian due to a number of miracles involving two brothers, Marcellian and Marcus, and the healing of a mute woman, Zoe, a convert to Christianity.

When Sebastian's faith was discovered, he was sentenced to die by being shot full of arrows. It was a horrible way to die! But when St. Irene of Rome, the widow of St. Castulus, went to collect Sebastian's body, she discovered that he was still alive. She nursed him back to health, only to have Sebastian publicly denounce the emperor for his cruelty to Christians. This time, the emperor had him beaten to death.

St. Sebastian is considered the patron saint of archers, as well as the patron saint for a holy death. He is also associated with sufferers of the plague because many sufferers of the disease were cured after praying for his **INTERCESSION**.

When athletes seek a patron saint, many look to St. Sebastian for inspiration.



Saint Sebastian Interceding for the Plague Stricken, by Josse Lieferinxe

His incredible physical strength and endurance in the face of his terrible ordeal exemplify the excellent conditioning athletes aspire to attain. St. Sebastian's conviction and persistence in bringing others to the faith are qualities that not only athletes, but all of us, should find appealing and worth imitating.

St. Sebastian, pray for us. Give us strength on our journey as we see it to God's good end.

Challenge of the Week

- This week, pray for the release of souls from **PURGATORY**. Copy this powerful prayer into the space below, and offer it on behalf of those who have died. If you've recently lost someone dear to you, remember that person in particular:

“Eternal Father, I offer you the most precious blood of your divine Son, Jesus, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for all the holy souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, for those in my own home and within my family. Amen.” (Prayer of St. Gertrude the Great)

- Go to Confession this week.

Invite your family or friends to go with you. Plan something fun to do afterward to celebrate your fresh start. Write about it in the space below.

- Just say it!** Is there someone with whom you need to be reconciled, someone who needs your apology or forgiveness? What are you waiting for? Talk to them or write them a letter if that would be easier. Write about your experience in the space below.

✠ Closing Prayer

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

—Romans 6:23

Lord Jesus, we sin and we know it. We'd like to pretend it doesn't matter, and that we're not hurting anyone, but in this lesson we have learned that we damage our own souls and often the souls of others when we turn away from you.

Give us the grace to live each day with our eyes on heaven. Help us to recognize and repent of any habits or attitudes that keep us from loving you with all our hearts. Amen.

Taking It Home

Wrap-Up

The walls of the Capuchin Crypt in Rome are adorned with a most distinctive motif: human bones. From the earliest days of the Church, *memento mori* (“remember death”) was a phrase used to describe the attitude of believers toward every aspect of life: They always lived with their final destiny in view.

In this phase of our *Chosen* journey, we move from facts about God and the Church to a deeper examination of what the Church teaches and how that affects us. As we do, it is helpful for us to keep our “end goal” in mind. The Church refers to this end goal as the “four last things”: death, **JUDGMENT**, heaven, and hell. (This includes Purgatory, which is understood to be like heaven’s “mudroom,” where we go to get cleaned up before entering our Father’s house.)

At one time or another, someone has probably asked you if you are “saved,” or if you know you are going to heaven when you die. This question reminds us that, while many Christian groups embrace certain Catholic teachings, the application of those teachings in daily practice can vary significantly. Jesus was very clear that hell is

For next week’s “Review Game,” be sure to read over the following ...

1. **Watch It!** questions (page 57)
2. **Wrap-Up**
3. **“What’s That Word?”**
4. **Memory Verse**

Don’t forget to do your **Challenge of the Week** (page 61)

a real state and that it is a real possibility for one’s eternal destiny.¹ Although God wants *everyone* in heaven,² he will not force himself on anyone. He gave us free will so we could choose *freely* to live in eternal union with him.

In an effort to reconcile the idea of a loving, merciful God with the reality of hell, some deny that God will hold us accountable for our choices—so long as we “have faith.” But this is simply not what God has revealed to us through his Word or what has been handed down through the apostles. Catholics believe that we become children of God at Baptism,³ and that we must persevere in faith to the end, by the grace of God, to reach eternal life.⁴

We must choose God by the way we live our lives. We must always *memento mori*—remember we will die. This lesson reminds us to take our choices seriously, to love and serve others diligently, and to seek reconciliation urgently when we mess up. Remember that no matter how “messy” we get, God wants to save us, never gives up on us, and has promised to be with us “to the end” (Matthew 24:13).

“What’s That Word?”

HEAVEN

Heaven is “the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (CCC 1024). Every true joy we experience in this life comes from God, like rays of sunlight reflecting off things and shining on us.⁵ We get a glimpse of the joyful **COMMUNION OF SAINTS** through our family and friends. We get a taste of the love of the Trinity by loving one another. We get a glimpse of the vastness of God by looking up at the stars. In heaven, we get the fullness of the “sun” as we “soak up” God directly for all eternity. In heaven, we directly experience the source of all joy forever.

HELL

We have been created to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. But love, by its very nature, must be freely given. “Forced love” is a contradiction in terms. This is why God created us with free will—so that we might love. Because we are free to choose good and act in love, we are also free to choose evil and make unloving, sinful choices. If we freely choose to do something we know is mortally sinful, we lose **SANCTIFYING GRACE** (which is necessary for salvation).

Those who willfully persist in a state of **MORTAL SIN** until death—that is, those who freely choose to reject God—cannot be saved. God cannot force us to love him and be with him forever in heaven against our will. So there must be a place for those who reject him. This place is *hell*.⁶ In hell, people are separated from the source of every joy.

JUDGMENT

A *judgment* is made when one thing is compared to another, such as when we get a report card. Our teacher compares our academic performance against the expectations he or she outlined at the

beginning of the class. We are sometimes surprised by the grade we receive, but we usually have a good sense of how our performance compares to what was expected.

At the end of our lives, we will experience the *particular judgment* of God, and we will know how our actions and life compared to what he made us to be. This judgment will determine how we spend eternity, either with God in heaven or separated from him in hell.⁷ When Jesus returns at the end of time “to judge the living and the dead” (see CCC 1040), all will experience the *Last Judgment*, when at last justice, love, and truth will triumph over evil. After that Last Judgment and the resurrection of the body, people will be whole, body and soul, again, either in heaven or in hell.

PURGATORY

Purgatory is the state of preparation and purification for those who die in the state of grace but are not yet ready for heaven due to remaining imperfections in their souls.⁸ Life with God in heaven will be more exciting and intense than anything we have ever done or can even imagine. If we are not yet able to love perfectly, we will find the experience of heaven more painful than happy. So God, in his mercy, created a place where we can be purified so that we enter heaven prepared to experience its blessings. We are called to pray and “offer up” our sufferings for the souls in Purgatory, so that their sufferings might be lessened and their entry into heaven may occur more quickly. It is a beautiful way to express our love for family and friends who have died and to extend forgiveness to those who have hurt us and who we were unable to forgive while they were living. Once they enter heaven ahead of us, they will become our biggest prayer support!

Any questions ?



What about Purgatory? Where is it in Scripture?

The word “Purgatory”—like the words “Trinity,” “Bible,” and “Incarnation”—is not found explicitly in Scripture. However, like all of the above, belief in Purgatory is found in Sacred Tradition and *implied* in Scripture.

Scripture passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:13 and 1 Peter 1:7 and the *Catechism* tell us of getting to heaven through a “purifying fire.” From the start, the early Christians took up the Jewish tradition of praying for the dead who are still being purified. The Church teaches that, if we die in a state of grace (i.e., free from mortal sin), we will go to heaven. Because nothing unclean can enter the kingdom of heaven,⁹ many of us leave this world needing to be purified of any remaining traces or attachments to sin. This process of purification is called “Purgatory,” which purifies us of venial sins and temporal punishment due to the sins we have committed.¹⁰

Memory Verse:

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” —James 4:8



Did You Know?

St. Catherine of Siena, a trusted advisor to Pope Gregory XI and a great “doctor of the Church,” had difficulty learning to read.

So ... what should I say when my Protestant friends ask if I’m “saved”?

The short answer is, “Yes.”

The longer answer is:

“I believe that Jesus’ death on the cross and Resurrection from the dead *made it possible for all* people to be saved.

“I believe that even though Jesus died and rose for all of us, everyone is not automatically saved as a result. I believe it is God’s plan to apply the fruits of Jesus’ saving work to individuals through Baptism.¹¹

“I believe that salvation is not just a one-time event, but a share in God’s very life that can increase, diminish, and end just like any relationship; it begins in Baptism as a birth into new life.

“I believe that the ‘saved’ are guided by the Church and strengthened for the journey by receiving him in the **EUCCHARIST**.¹² I believe that *those who persevere* in faith will one day be united with God in heaven.¹³

“I believe that, in redeeming me, *God has not taken away my freedom to reject him*, and thus I can jeopardize my salvation if I want to. I also believe that my relationship with God can suffer if I simply neglect him in daily choices that fall short of outright rejection.

“I believe that my life with God—my salvation—necessarily begins, is nourished, and is restored when lost, within his family, which is the Church that Christ established, the ‘pillar and foundation of truth’” (1 Timothy 3:15, NAB).