



What should I know about heaven, hell & purgatory?

GOSPEL



ANSWERS

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Afterwards the other five came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake,* for you know neither the day nor the hour. – **Matthew 25:1-13**

Saints & inspirational stories

Stanislaw Wiorek

Stanislaw had a deep faith in God which moved him to become a priest. This was during a dangerous time in Poland when the Nazis were persecuting priests and religious because they opposed the Nazi Regime. Stanislaw was a man who lived his life for God without fear and that is what ultimately won him heaven as a martyr.



Alois Andritski

Alois was a faithful priest who was imprisoned by the Nazis for putting on a Christmas play in his parish. That act ultimately cost him his life. He was known to be faithful to God in the little things and this is what allowed him to be faithful to God in the end.



Team discussion

After reading over the YOUCAT numbers on the following pages, how do you think the Youth Catechism answers the question of the week? Were there any words or ideas that you did not fully understand that you would like to understand better?

Answer in your own words:



YouCat numbers for this week



#53 What is hell? Our faith calls “hell” the condition of final separation from God. Anyone who sees love clearly in the face of God and, nevertheless, does not want it decides freely to have this condition instead. [Jesus, who knows what hell is like, speaks about it as the “outer darkness” (Mt 8:12). Expressed in our terms, it is cold rather than hot. It is horrible to contemplate a condition of complete rigidity and hopeless isolation from everything that could bring aid, relief, joy, and consolation into one’s life.

#158 What is heaven? Heaven is the endless moment of love. Nothing more separates us from God, whom our soul loves and has sought our whole life long. Together with all the angels and saints we will be able to rejoice forever in and with God. If you have ever observed a couple looking at each other lovingly or seen a baby nursing who looks for his mother’s eyes as though it wanted to store up every smile forever, then you have some inkling of heaven. To be able to see God face to face—that is like one, single, never-ending moment of love.

#52 What is heaven? Heaven is God’s milieu, the dwelling place of the angels and saints, and the goal of creation. With the words “heaven and earth” we designate the whole of created reality. Heaven is not a place in the universe. It is a condition in the next life. Heaven is where God’s will is done without any resistance. Heaven happens when life is present in its greatest intensity and blessedness—a kind of life that we do not find on earth. If with God’s help we arrive someday in heaven, then waiting for us will be “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

#54 What are angels? Angels are pure spiritual creatures of God who have understanding and will. They have no bodies, cannot die, and are usually not visible. They live constantly in God’s presence and convey God’s will and God’s protection to men. An angel, wrote Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, is “so to speak the personal thought with which God is turned toward me”. At the same time the angels are turned completely toward their Creator. They burn with love for him and serve him day and night. Their song of praise is never-ending. In Sacred Scripture the angels who have fallen away from God are called devils or demons.

#55 Can we interact with angels? Yes. We can call on angels for help and ask them to intercede with God. Every person receives from God a guardian angel. It is good and sensible to pray to one’s guardian angel for oneself and for others. Angels can also make themselves noticeable in the life of a Christian, for example, as bearers of a message or as helpful guides. Our faith has nothing to do with the false angels of New Age spirituality and other forms of esotericism.



#223 In what way is the Holy Eucharist anticipation an anticipation of eternal life? Jesus promised his disciples, and us with them, that we will one day sit at table with him. Therefore every Holy Mass is a “memorial of the blessed Passion” (Eucharistic Prayer I, called the Roman Canon), the fullness of grace, and a pledge of future glory.

#159 What is purgatory? Purgatory, often imagined as a place, is actually a condition. Someone who dies in God’s grace (and therefore at peace with God and men) but who still needs purification before he can see God face to face is in purgatory. When Peter had betrayed Jesus, the Lord turned around and looked at Peter: “And Peter went out and wept bitterly”—a feeling like being in purgatory. Just such a purgatory probably awaits most of us at the moment of our death: the Lord looks at us full of love—and we experience burning shame and painful remorse over our wicked or “merely” unloving behavior. Only after this purifying pain will we be capable of meeting his loving gaze in untroubled heavenly joy.

#160 Can we help the departed who are in the condition of purgatory? Yes, since all those who are baptized into Christ form one communion and are united with one another, the living can also help the souls of the faithful departed in purgatory. When a man is dead, he can do nothing more for himself. The time of active probation is past. But we can do something for the faithful departed in purgatory. Our love extends into the afterlife. Through our fasting, prayers, and good works, but especially through the celebration of Holy Eucharist, we can obtain grace for the departed.

#161 What is hell? Hell is the condition of everlasting separation from God, the absolute absence of love. Someone who consciously and with full consent dies in serious sin, without repenting, and refuses God’s merciful, forgiving love forever, excludes himself from communion with God and the saints. We do not know whether anyone at the moment of death can look absolute Love in the face and still say No. But our freedom makes that decision possible. Jesus warns us again and again not to separate ourselves definitively from him by shutting our hearts against the need of his brothers and sisters: “Depart from me, you cursed. . . . As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me”

#162 But if God is love, how can there be a hell? God does not damn men. Man himself is the one who refuses God’s merciful love and voluntarily deprives himself of (eternal) life by excluding himself from communion with God. God yearns for communion even with the worst sinner; he wants everyone to convert and be saved. Yet God created man to be free and respects his decisions. Even God cannot compel love. As a lover he is “powerless” when someone chooses hell instead of heaven.

#285 What is eternal happiness? Eternal happiness is seeing God and being taken up into God’s happiness. In God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit there is unending life, joy, and communion. To be taken up into it will be an incomprehensible, infinite happiness for us men. This happiness is the pure gift of God’s grace, for we men can neither bring it about ourselves nor comprehend it in its magnitude. God would like us to decide in favor of our happiness; we should choose God freely, love him above all things, do good and avoid evil insofar as we are able.