

TOPIC: Death, Resurrection, After Life

OBJECTIVE: to help the students realize that s/he has already *died with Christ* sacramentally through Baptism; the physical death completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act.

MATERIALS: black board and chalk

TEACHER'S NOTE: This can be a difficult subject to discuss. Many people have superstitions about talking about death. Handle any questions that come up with sensitivity.

BACKGROUND: *Christian Vision of Death*

I Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When *the single course of our earthly life* is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: *It is appointed for men to die once*. There is no *reincarnation* after death.

II In death, God calls us to himself. Therefore the Christian can experience a desire for death like St. Paul's: *My desire is to depart and be with Christ*. S/he can transform his/her own death into an act of obedience and love towards the Father, after the example of Christ.

III 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 for ever, so all of us will rise at the last day.

IV As a consequence of original sin, we must suffer *bodily death from which we would have been immune had we not sinned*.

V Jesus, the Son of God, freely suffered death for us in complete and free submission to the will of God, his Father. By his death he has conquered death, and so opened the possibility of salvation to everyone.

VI By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has *opened* heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTION:

1. How difficult/easy was this to do? Why? Why not?
2. Would _____ (someone else's definition of heaven/hell) be your idea of heaven/hell? Why? Why not?
3. Is it possible that all people will experience heaven differently?
4. Why do you think hell is defined by separation from God?
5. Do you believe in heaven? Why? Why not?
6. Do you believe in hell? Why? Why not?

I ACTIVITY: You might look for an incident in the students lives or the community to introduce this subject. **Example:** the death of friend or family member, a car accident, etc. Have the students sit in a circle with the class candle in the middle. Have them discuss how they feel about death.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTION:

1. Have you ever thought about death? Why? Why not?
2. Has anyone close to you ever died?
3. Are you afraid of death? Why? Why not?
4. What happens after death? Where do you think you go?

II Read the following: John 11:1-44

There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha and he was ill...The sisters sent this message to Jesus, *Lord, the man you love is ill. On receiving the message, Jesus said, This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.*

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that he was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, *Let us go back to Judaea...Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.* The disciples said to him, *Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.* Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by rest he meant sleep; so Jesus put it plainly. *Lazarus is dead; and for our sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.* Then Thomas --know as the Twin-- said to the other disciples, *Let us also go to die with him.*

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever you ask of him.* Jesus said to her, *Your brother will rise again.* Martha said, *I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.* Jesus said:

I am the resurrection.

*Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies will live,
and whoever gives and believes in me will never die.*

Do you believe this?

Yes, Lord, she said, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, *The Master is here and wants to see you...* Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet saying, *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus was greatly distressed and with a profound sigh he said, *Where have you put him?* They said, *Lord, come and see.* Jesus wept; and the Jews said, *See how much he loved him!* But there were some who remarked, *He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man's death?* Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, *Take the stone away.* Martha said to him, *Lord by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.* Jesus replied, *Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?* So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

*Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.
I myself knew that you hear me always,
but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around me,
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.*

When he had said this, he cried in aloud voice, *Lazarus come out!* The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of material and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, *Unbind him, let him go free.*

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think about this reading?
2. Why do you think that Jesus waited until Lazarus was dead to come?
3. How do you feel when it said, *Jesus wept?*
4. How would you respond to the death of a friend?
5. If you were Martha, and Jesus told you, *I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?* How would you respond?

III Write the following definitions on the board:

HEAVEN: is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

HELL: a state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed.

from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Have the students discuss these definitions. Pass out paper and pencils and have the students write down, based on these definitions, what would be heaven for them and what would be hell for them. When they are finished ask for volunteers to share their work with the class.