

# **My Catholic Faith! Study Group**

## **Session 8 – Heaven, Hell, Purgatory and the End of Time**

### **Pre-meeting Prep**

Participants should be asked to read Chapter Eight of the *My Catholic Faith!* book prior to this meeting.

### **5 minutes – Gather**

Snacks and informal social time as people gather as people arrive. Try to be punctual and gather everyone together no longer than 5 minutes after the scheduled starting time.

### **5-10 minutes – Opening prayer and Scripture**

Everyone sits quietly as the leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and then invites a period of silence in the following way:

***Let us quiet ourselves as we begin this study of our glorious Catholic faith together. “Lord, as we sit here for a minute in silence, help each one of us to bring our own questions, concerns, fears, and joys to You. Help us, in this moment of silence, to be attentive to Your gentle voice speaking to us, directing us, and calling us to a deeper faith.”***

Take about a minute in silence with eyes closed so that each person can speak to our Lord about their own particular cares and concerns.

Leader reads the following invitation: ***Let us ponder the Word of God. Let us reflect upon our own faith journey with the following questions: Do I believe? How deep is my faith? Am I open to letting God speak to me? Am I open to the Word of God and willing to let God's truth sink in more deeply? Am I willing to let this new faith change my life?***

The leader of the night prayerfully reads all of Chapter 21 from the Book of Revelation.

Leader then says: ***Let us take a moment in silence reflecting upon these words.*** (a minute of silence)

The Leader invites everyone to pray the following prayer:

***Lord, Jesus, we believe that You will return one day to judge the living and the dead. On that day, You will establish Your new and glorious Kingdom. Help us to look forward to that day with expectant faith and hope. Lord, You are filled with both justice and compassion. Help us always to live in righteousness as we also rely upon Your abundance of mercy. Jesus, we trust in You!***

The prayer time concludes with everyone professing the Apostles' Creed:

***I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.***

#### **45-50 minutes – Discussion questions**

Each person should be invited to share something or ask a question, if he/she chooses, regarding the questions/discussion starters below. Go through one question at a time, and give each person an opportunity to say something if he/she chooses. Avoid having one or two persons dominate the discussion. Go around the circle and do not be afraid to share! Your insights might assist someone else in their understanding of the topics. Your question might very well be the same question someone else has. Some of the questions below will invite a personal sharing; other questions will invite you to share with others what you read in Chapter Eight. The goal is to share personally and to also make sure that the faith of our Church is clearly expressed and understood by all.

1. The “Communion of Saints” refers to the fact that all those living in God’s grace are united in Christ. Those in Heaven, on Earth, and in Purgatory share a common bond. Share any initial and brief thoughts you have regarding this unity. Do you see yourself as being united in some way with those in Heaven and in Purgatory? Explain.
2. The “Church Militant” refers specifically to those on Earth who are united to Christ and live within His grace. We are united in the following ways. Share any thoughts on how you see these aspects of our faith as a source of unity in your life with other Christians:
  1. Faith: Our shared faith makes us one.
  2. Sacraments: We are each fed by these precious gifts of God's presence in our world.
  3. Charism: Each person is entrusted with unique gifts to be used for the upbuilding of other members of the Church.
  4. Common possessions: The early Church had common possessions. As members today, we see the need for constant charity and generosity with the goods we have been blessed with. We are to use them for the good of the Church, first and foremost.
  5. Charity: In addition to the sharing of material things, we more importantly share our love. This is charity and has the effect of uniting us.

3. The “Church Triumphant” refers to those who are now in Heaven sharing everlasting life. It refers to the saints! Share with others about your favorite saint and why you like that saint. Share also about your understanding of Heaven as it is now. How would you describe Heaven to a child if asked?
4. The “Church Suffering” refers to those in Purgatory. This often misunderstood and ignored doctrine of our faith is important to understand as a way of growing in holiness. If we realize that we have to either get holy (perfect) now or else in Purgatory, why not do it now? Share your thoughts and questions on Purgatory. Speak also to the process of purification you are called to embrace in this life so as to avoid it in the next.
5. Hell is real. It’s a state of permanent separation from God. Hell is a result of our own free choice. Share your thoughts about the doctrine on Hell, and express any questions you have about this reality. How do you explain the fact that we have an all-merciful and all-loving God, as well as the fact that there is a state of existence called Hell?
6. Do you understand what it means when we say that Jesus “will return to judge the living and the dead?” Or that we believe “in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come?” Share your thoughts on the new age to come as taught by our Church and as was expressed in the opening Scripture from the Book of Revelation.
7. Our Blessed Mother is the Mother and Queen of all things. Reflect upon her role in three ways:
  1. What role do you give her in your life? Have you fully consecrated yourself to her? Do you understand this act?
  2. How do you see her role in the life of the Church today?
  3. What will her role be for all eternity?

### **20 minutes – Final reflections and sharing**

Go around and give each person an opportunity to share any other final thoughts. What stood out to each of you the most? Do you have any lingering questions or confusion that others can help clarify?

### **5 minutes – Closing prayer**

Leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and invites a minute of silence with all eyes closed. Each person should reflect upon what was discussed, especially what stood out to him/her the most.

Leader then prays the following prayer:

***Lord, Jesus, again we thank You for Your goodness and for Your fidelity. You are the glorious Lord of lords and King of kings. We believe that You will one day return to establish Your glorious Kingdom as You create the new Heavens and the new Earth.***

***Mother Mary, You are the Queen of all saints and the Queen of all things. You will reign forever with Your Son in the new and final order of creation. We turn to you and seek your prayers as we pray:  
Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ!***

Leader then invites everyone present to offer their own prayer in the following way (Note: This can be done out loud, but it might be preferable if it's done in silence at the discretion of the leader):

***Let us now each bring our own personal concerns before our Lord, trusting that He hears us and knows all we need. Let us entrust these prayers to Him with full confidence that He desires to take control.*** (Take a minute of silence for each person to speak to God about their own personal needs for the night).

Leader then invites everyone to close with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.