

# THE VISITATION

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## There Needs to be Better Catechesis on Hell - by Fr. Robert J. Carr

We need to look again at the Church teaching on Hell, sin and salvation. Especially, what we teach our parishioners on Sundays.

I learned that many Catholics live in terror of eternal damnation. They fear committing mortal sin to the point that they base their faith in fearfully avoiding sin. The focus of our faith is really to live the commandments to love God and neighbor. Those who seek to live in that direction will never suffer damnation. I believe this demonstrates a failure of some Catholic catechesis.

Anyone who knows me also knows I reject the Baltimore Catechism. The reason is that it offers pithy answers to catechetical questions; Church teaching is deep, not pithy. One cannot explain our faith with sentences that literally you can read in a tweet on X. We need a profound understanding of our faith that leads us to understand how to live what God commands. We also need to explain to our parishioners what the Church actually teaches.

Recently, I was a guest on the podcast Uncharted Catholic Man to teach the Church's doctrine about Hell. I know the catechism but I also drew on Pope St. John Paul II's audience where he taught about

Hell in 1999.

What most people fear is that they will stand before the judgement seat of God and find all their efforts to go to Heaven were not good enough and God will damn them. This is not Catholic teaching at all. We do not go to Heaven by living a certain standard of comportment that will merit us salvation. We go to Heaven by choosing to accept God's relationship which he initiates in our lives. We do it daily. We seek to love God and neighbor by rooting our lives in daily prayer and opening ourselves to be channels of God's love to others. We seek to be more open to his love every day.

However, many Catholics somehow never learned this and came to believe that God is looking to make sure you did not sin prior to standing before his throne. There may be people reading this and not believe some Catholics reduce our faith to such an incorrect teaching, however, they do. Our faith scares them and many eventually leave believing they cannot possibly live to the standard they believe God calls them.

This teaching creates a false understanding of the great Sacrament of Confession. The sacrament which is to restore our relationship with God and help us to grow in

holiness is reduced to the condition to our receiving communion. We go to confession simply to confess our sins in order to receive the Eucharist. The entire catechesis on the nature of this powerful sacrament is lost because people do not want to have restrict themselves from receiving the Eucharist in front of the whole Church.

Catholics, however, who truly understand the nature of the sacrament will realize just how important and powerful it is and celebrate it joyfully instead of it being a chore to prevent embarrassment before the parish community for not receiving the Eucharist.

This really needs to change drastically in our Church. We truly have to catechize our parishioners well so they have a true understanding of the greatness of God.

Let's look at one aspect of this.

In the Summer of 1999, then Pope John Paul II gave a series of audiences on Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.

In regard to Hell, he explained:

*"Eternal damnation", therefore, is not attributed to God's initiative because in his merciful love he can only desire the salvation of the beings he created. In reality, it is the creature who closes himself to his love. Damnation consists precisely*

*...continued on page 3*

# Dear Fraternity Brothers and Friends of the Priesthood

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One of the objectives for the Fraternity of Priests is to inform our donors about the ongoing financial health and details of the organization. We thank those many faithful benefactors who help make our service possible. Thank you!

## Fraternity Financial Report

Monthly Budget:  
**\$4,750.00**

Actual Donations:  
**\$1,833.00**

Budget Deficit:  
**\$2,917.00**

*Current as of  
December 31, 2024.*

In May, I look forward to celebrating the 55th anniversary of my ordination to priesthood. (Covid cancelled the celebration of the 50th in 2020.) Over these years I have served in parishes as parochial vicar, member of a team ministry, pastor and administrator. Presently in retirement, I live in a parish and help as needed and serve as a spiritual director to a small group of seminarians at St. John Seminary in Boston. Recently I have been reflecting on this question. If I were twenty years younger and beginning ministry as pastor in a new parish/parishes what would I do today? How would I begin?

I would begin by listening to the Lord in prayer and listening to the people of the parish through informal conversations and "listening sessions". In the past I have initiated such "listening sessions" in several parishes. For several months I gathered small and diverse groups together to reflect on these questions:

- a) What do you think is presently done well in the parish/parishes?
- b) What needs strengthening or improving?
- c) Are there needs that are not met and what possible ministries can meet them?

Today I would add a fourth question: Are there ministries/activities that have been done long-term and are not bearing fruit? Should they continue?

The Church exists to evangelize. Pope St. John Paul II once stated that the time has come to "devote all the resources of the Church to a New Evangelization". Certainly this is even more urgent today especially in the West and in the United States. In reflection with parishioners I would want the parish community to embrace a means of bringing evangelization to the front burner of parish life. Some possibilities are Divine Renovation by Fr. James Mallon which recommends Catholic

Alpha. Another possibility is the ChristLife Process out of Baltimore, Maryland. There are also other possibilities for parish renewal. Should we be looking into



Encounter Ministries that teaches how to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and minister with the gifts of the Spirit?

Regarding my own life of faith, I would certainly continue to be faithful to my Fraternity of Priests group and especially our commitment to the daily hour of personal prayer. Additionally, I would want to surround myself with a small group of faith-filled parishioners, developing a leadership team to work with me along with staff and parish pastoral and finance councils. I would also desire to seek out some personal coaching when needed to improve my abilities as a leader. This is offered through Catholic Leadership Institute and Divine Renovation.

These are just some insights of a retired priest. Hopefully they can be helpful to other priests and perhaps be shared by our lay supporter with priests they know and love.

Finally, just a reminder that our summer Fraternity Conference will take place at the 50th anniversary of the Steubenville Conferences for Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians from June 23 – 27. Register directly at Steubenville: <https://steubenvilleconferences.com/events/priests-deacons-seminarians-retreat> (A letter of suitability is necessary.)

Fr. John Kiley

**Editor's Note:** Please send articles, comments, and photos to the our editor, Fr. Bob Carr, via e-mail to [editor@fraternityofpriests.org](mailto:editor@fraternityofpriests.org). Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted.

*...continued from page 1  
in definitive separation from God,  
freely chosen by the human person  
and confirmed with death that seals  
his choice for ever. God's judgement  
ratifies this state.*

Hell is a choice by the person who closes him or herself off from God; that person is damned by his or her own initiative. It is a choice freely made that despite all that God does to lead us toward salvation turns us purposely away from God on our own initiative.

Soon after I appeared on the program, I saw one of the most popular Catholic influencers explaining what sins send people to Hell. However, as Pope John Paul II explains no sins send people to Hell, that gets us back to the standard of comportment model that leads many to fear damnation unnecessarily. Hell is a freely chosen disposition by one who rejects all that God cares to give us.

According to Catholic tradition, Lucifer purposely chose Hell because he and his now fallen angels refused to serve humanity. In that way, again it is pride that led to their damnation. No one who truly wants an unconditional relationship with God can end up in Hell because they would not freely choose it by default.

St Alphonsus Liguori answered the question on who goes to Hell by simply saying those who pray are saved and those who don't are damned. He further elaborated something that may appear obvious. Those who pray will pray for the grace of salvation and those who do not obviously will not.

So many Catholics, at least in the

United States apparently did not learn this and they tell me they are afraid of going to Hell.

The now sainted pope continued and ended his catechesis by teaching:

*Damnation remains a real possibility, but it is not granted to us, without special divine revelation, to know which human beings are effectively involved in it. The thought of hell — and even less the improper use of biblical images — must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom within the proclamation that the risen Jesus has conquered Satan, giving us the Spirit of God who makes us cry “Abba, Father!” (Rm 8:15; Gal 4:6).*

Previously, another of the most well-known Catholic influencers tweeted that we all have a choice either Jesus or Hell. This is precisely what does not work in our catechesis. The pope proscribes the concept of using false biblical images and other tools to pour fear into human hearts so that they convert and come to Mass weekly. He rather explains that Hell, which is a state of being and not a place, is the product of making a free choice against the grace of God.

God is the central element of our anthropology. God created us and leads us back to himself. Therefore, those two facts make up the key elements of our own anthropology. If we eliminate God from our self-understand then our belief in whom we are changes completely. So, when we accept God and his love in our life we have a completely different concept of what it means to be human. We discover a new end to our existence to be united with the

one who created us and is calling us back to himself in his presence in the Kingdom of God. It is not part of God's will that we reject this and turn from him and since that is not our final destiny it thwarts the ends for which God created us.

There is absolutely nothing in our teaching that says that certain sins send people to Hell, that Hell is the default for all of us, that we have to choose Jesus or he will cast us into Hell and all the non-sense that lead people to live in terror asking how a loving God can cast people into eternal punishment.

The fact is, God is incapable of denying our salvation but we are capable of turning away from his generous gift by carving Him out of our lives and going our own way. Holiness, which is our vocation, is simply to live as people God created us to be in communication with him and service to him all through our lives.

Jesus says it best in Mt 7:9-11 when he asks which father would give his son a rock if he asks for a loaf of bread. Similarly, if God is greater than even the best of earthly fathers, how can he decide to cast someone into Hell he created for Heaven just because he did not follow a standard of comportment? Instead, a great earthly father would work with his son as much as he could to lead him to become what he is destined to become. So too will our Heavenly Father. He does all he can to ensure our salvation. Jesus himself gave all he had so that we could be saved. Therefore, the only way to Hell is to reject all that and go our way. The choice is ours not God's.

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Please send us your prayer intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

# THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

March 2025						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Rev. 30 Thomas Quirk <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. 31 Ray Ratzenberger <i>Tucson</i>					1 <b>For our Holy Father, Pope Francis</b>
Rev. 2 Joseph Short <i>Sioux Falls</i>	Rev. 3 Gregory Frankman <i>Sioux Falls</i>	Rev. 4 Randy Phillips <i>Sioux Falls</i>	Rev. 5 Jerome Ranek <i>Sioux Falls</i>	6 <b>For the souls of our deceased FOP members</b>	7 <b>For prayer requests received</b>	8 Mark Innocenti <i>St. Cloud</i>
Rev. 9 Peter Kirchner <i>St. Cloud</i>	Rev. 10 Gerald Mischke <i>St. Cloud</i>	Rev. 11 Gregory Paffel <i>St. Cloud</i>	Rev. 12 Todd Schneider <i>St. Cloud</i>	Rev. 13 Mark Stang <i>St. Cloud</i>	Rev. 14 James Dyer <i>St. Louis</i>	Rev. Msgr. 15 Edmund Griesedieck <i>St. Louis</i>
Rev. 16 Martin Mannion <i>St. Louis</i>	Rev. 17 David Novak <i>St. Louis</i>	Rev. 18 Gerald Zienaa <i>Tamale, Ghana</i>	Rev. 19 James Brown <i>Toledo</i>	Rev. 20 Kishore Kottana <i>Toledo</i>	Rev. 21 Edward Littelmann <i>Toledo</i>	Rev. 22 Nicholas Weibl <i>Toledo</i>
Rev. 23 Dale Branson <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. 24 Isaac Fynn <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. 25 John Gonzales <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. 26 James Hobert <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. 27 Bill Kohler <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. 28 Liam Leahy <i>Tucson</i>	Rev. Msgr. 29 Domenico Pinti <i>Tucson</i>

## A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

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<http://www.fraternityofpriests.org>

O Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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