

CATHOLIC GUIDELINES FOR THOSE IN DANGER OF DEATH

When someone faces a life-threatening condition, a priest should be called.

If they are unbaptized, a priest may baptize them. If a priest is not available, anyone can baptize in danger of death by pouring clean water over the head and saying “*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” This should only be done if it is in accord with the desire of the sick person.

If they are a baptized, non-Catholic, who wishes to become Catholic, and are in danger of death, a priest can receive them into the Catholic Church, confirm them and give them Holy Communion and the Anointing of the Sick.

For Catholics, a priest can hear their Confession, giving them Absolution, the Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Communion (if they are able to receive). These three sacraments are the “Last Sacraments,” or the “Last Rites.” For those in immediate danger of death, an Apostolic Pardon may also be given by the priest, which grants a Plenary Indulgence.



The Bible tells us that the sick should call a priest (presbyter) so they can be anointed and confess their sins.

“Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins...”
James 5:13-16

The Last Sacraments

The Last Sacraments are Confession, Anointing and Holy Communion.

Confession: All unconfessed mortal sins should be confessed to a priest. You don’t want to go to your grave carrying the weight of serious sin. Christ established this sacrament so that we could be assured of his forgiveness, have his peace and be reconciled to his Church.

The Anointing of the Sick continues the healing ministry of Jesus. One does not have to be on the very edge of death to receive this sacrament. Canon law tells us that “*the sacrament of the anointing of the sick should be celebrated at the beginning of a serious illness.*” One can be anointed if they have grown frail with old age, are preparing for surgery, or have a life threatening illness. The sacrament can be repeated once a month, or if a person’s condition takes a turn for the worse.



Viaticum, Food for the Journey: “*The Christian faithful who are in danger of death from any cause are to be nourished by Holy Communion in the form of Viaticum.*” The Latin word “*viaticum*” means “*provisions for a journey.*” When the Eucharist is given to someone who is in danger of death, it is called, “*Viaticum.*”

“The celebration of the Eucharist as viaticum, food for the passage through death to eternal life, is the sacrament proper to the dying Christian. It is the completion and crown of the Christian life on this earth, signifying that the Christian follows the Lord to eternal glory and the banquet of the heavenly kingdom.”

“The anointing of the sick should be celebrated at the beginning of a serious illness. Viaticum, celebrated when death is close, will then be better understood as the last sacrament of Christian life.”

“The elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour.”

THE FOUR LAST THINGS

As we approach the end of our liturgical year, our Mass readings begin to focus on the end of time and the final judgment. (Our new Liturgical Year will begin with the First Sunday of Advent.) The Catechism of the Catholic Church (abbreviated, “CCC”) reminds us that there are “Four Last Things:”

Death, Judgment, Heaven & Hell.

Death: *“Remembering our mortality helps us to realize that we only have a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment.”* CCC 1007

Individual Judgment (at the moment of our death): *“Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately, -- or immediate and everlasting damnation. ‘At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.’”* CCC 1022

Heaven: *“Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ (in Heaven).”* CCC 1023

Purgatory: *“All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification (Purgatory), so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.”* CCC 1030

Hell: *“We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: (Jesus said:) ‘He who does not love remains in death.’ (1 Jn 3:14) ... To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’”* CCC 1033

The Final Judgment (at the end of time): *“The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory.”* *“The (bodily) resurrection of all the dead, ‘of both the just and the unjust,’ will precede the Last Judgment.”* We will all stand before the Lord. *“The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences:*

“the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life,”

“the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation,”

“the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end,”

“that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death.” (CCC 101038-1041)