

- Last Sunday I spoke about purgatory, indulgences, and the need for our souls to be “trued up” in preparation for Judgment Day.
- Indeed, just as a carpenter will “true up” a board to bring about or restore a certain mechanical accuracy or form, our souls must be leveled, squared, and balanced so that they might be readied to join with God in the eternal embrace of Heaven.
- Heaven is not something any of us can presume upon. There’s a preparation process, a purification, that must occur if we are to be eternally united with our Lord in Heaven.
- This is part of the reason why the Church dedicates the month of November to contemplating the 4 Last Things: death, judgment, Heaven, and hell.
- The Church does this not to frighten us or to chastise us into behaving better, but simply to help us keep our eyes on the big picture of reality, to help us understand that our everyday actions can have eternal consequences.
- Because it’s so easy to be distracted by the here and now of life, we can easily forget how important it is for us to prepare well for the life to come. Like the foolish virgins, we can neglect the oil of virtue and good works and so be unprepared when the Bridegroom calls.
- So, it’s good to ponder death and what lies beyond it so as to be well prepared.
- As Catholics, we understand that death is the end of our earthly life, which lends a certain urgency to our lives. Being mindful of our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to get our lives in order and prepare well for death (cf. CCC 1007).
- But we also understand that death is a consequence of sin (Rom 6:23). While we have a mortal nature, God did not destine man to die; death was contrary to the plans of God when He created us. Rather, death entered into the world because of man’s sin. (CCC 1008).
- Yet Christ Jesus has transformed our death by His willingness to die. Jesus accepted His suffering and death “in an act of complete and free submission to His Father’s will. The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing” (CCC 1009).
- So in faith we can see that death has a positive meaning. Thus, we can believe with confidence that “if we have died with Christ, we will also live with Him” (2 Tim 2:11).
- Yet, “through Baptism, the Christian has already ‘died with Christ’ sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ’s grace, physical death completes this “dying with Christ” and so completes our incorporation into Him in His redeeming act” (CCC 1010).
- “In death, God calls man to Himself. Therefore the Christian . . . can transform his own death into an act of obedience and love towards the Father, after the example of Christ” (CCC 1011).
- In dying with faith in God, with hope in His promises, and with love for Him, we obediently respond to His summons to join Him for eternity.
- Like most priests, I’ve been to a lot of deathbeds. When someone has cultivated the virtues of faith, hope, and love within themselves, death can be immensely beautiful and peaceful.
- But there have been times when I’ve been with someone who was ill-prepared. I remember one time in particular when I went to the deathbed of a lady who had suffered through an abusive 50 years of marriage. She was bitter and angry, and unforgiving of her husband.
- At first, she refused to confess her sins of anger and unforgiveness, which scared me. So, I spent 45 minutes praying silently for God’s mercy, and pleading with her to forgive and confess her sins against her husband.

- Eventually, God's grace broke through, and she made a good confession and received Last Rites; and thankfully so, for she was dead just a few hours later.
  - It amazed me that someone could be so callous on their deathbed, so utterly reckless, yet that's the deadliness of sin. If you've spent your life nursing a grudge – even a just one – you're not likely to let it go on your deathbed. For most of us, we die as we live.
  - Yet as a priest – as a man who has staked his life on the promises of God's mercy – I've seen how His grace can break through the hardest of hearts at a deathbed. I know for certain that, if we make the slightest move toward God's mercy, He gives it generously.
  - But we must never presume on it. And living a life of faith, hope, and charity is our best bet if we wish to die in God's mercy and friendship.
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- In a funeral Mass we pray, "Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in Heaven" (cf. Preface of Christian Death 1).
  - It's such a beautiful thought, really, that death is simply a transition for us: the portal that moves us into a heavenly realm of existence. This is especially consoling considering that we suffer bodily death as a consequence of original sin.
  - But that's the nature of God: to bring good out of evil. Though death is the wages for our sins, God uses it to draw us to Himself.
  - We believe at death that the soul is separated from the body, but not permanently. While our bodies will decay, in the resurrection at the end of time, "God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul." (CCC 1016).
  - And we believe in a true resurrection of the flesh – not a symbolic or allegorical resurrection. This flesh that we now possess will be resurrected (CCC 1017).
  - Of course our union with God in Heaven after death is dependent upon how well we were prepared for our death. What matters is that we die in a state of grace, and not in mortal sin.
  - For the state of our soul at the moment of our death is permanent. Once we have passed beyond the veil separating this life from the next, there is no going back, there is no chance for mercy. Only judgment with its eternal consequences awaits us.
  - It's for this reason that the Church encourages us to prepare well for our death, which is the whole point of today's Gospel. At a time we do not know, the Bridegroom will come. And so we must prepare by staying in a state of grace and living holy, virtuous lives.
  - The oil mentioned in the Gospel parable today is that: it's the virtue, merits, and holiness of the wise virgins, which is something that cannot be shared with anyone else – which is why they tell the foolish virgins to go and buy oil for themselves.
  - And this oil: our virtues, merits, and good works is the only thing that we'll take with us to judgment day. Everything else, even what we consider most important, will be left behind.
  - So, my friends, ask yourselves: if you died today, would you be accounted amongst the foolish or the wise virgins? Do you consciously cultivate virtue and try to make reparation for your sins? Has your soul been "trued up," and are you well prepared for death?
  - St. Teresa of Avila once said, "Everything seems to me to pass so quickly . . . that we must concentrate our thoughts on how to die rather than on how to live." With her help, and the help of all the saints, may we each be well prepared when the Bridegroom calls us.