

# Catholic Faith Corner

Understanding, Teaching, and Living the Faith

Sea of Galilee at Sunrise



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## What Is After Death? Heaven? Hell? Oblivion?

by KATHLEEN GLAVICH, SND on [JUNE 21, 2017](#)  
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Currently I'm working on a chapter about the afterlife. We people engrossed in the demands of this present life don't tend to think about this topic until we come to a landmark birthday, someone we know dies, or a movie like *The Mummy* is released. Then we wonder, Is this all there is? We

Catholics are in good company in believing there is life beyond this one. The concept runs across civilizations and centuries, indicating that human beings possess an innate sense that death is not the end. The Egyptians preserved the bodies of their leaders in pyramids and surrounded them with items they would need in the next life. Qin, the first emperor of China, had a replica of his capital city built and about 8,000 terracotta soldiers, hundreds of chariots, and other things ready for his pleasure when he awoke from death. American Indians buried their dead with food and tools they might need in the next life. Mediums claim to put us in touch with our deceased loved ones.

The theology of the four last things—death, judgment, heaven, and hell— (called eschatology) is remarkably similar in world religions including Catholicism. Death is



**Mary Kathleen Glavich, SND**

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seen as a transition into another form of existence. It is a doorway, not a brick wall. For Hindus and Buddhists, death is an opportunity to be reincarnated and come closer to union with Brahman or nirvana, respectively regarded as the ultimate goal of life. Greeks and Romans believed that Charon ferried souls in his boat across the River Styx to the next world where they would be united with their loved ones. And for Catholics, death has been conquered by Christ through his death and resurrection that opened the gates to the next world to us.

Judgment is another common thread. The Egyptians believed in “The Weighing of Hearts” to determine people’s worthiness of a pleasant afterlife. Although Hindus and Buddhists do not believe in a formal judgment by anyone, they require enough merits (karma) to break through the cycle of reincarnations. The Romans held that the deceased’s life was evaluated by three judges, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aecus, who decided where the soul should be assigned. Judaism thought evolved from viewing judgment as God’s judging nations on the Day of the Lord to God’s judging individuals, either after death or in a general judgment or both. Muslims believe that on Judgment Day the deceased will be handed a book of deeds. If it is given to them in the right hand, they will be saved. If it is given behind their backs, they are doomed. People gather at a narrow bridge spanning hell. Those who are weighed down by evil deeds can’t cross it and fall into the fires. Christians believe that Jesus will judge us on love: how we have practiced the works of mercy.

The reward of the good, takes different forms in different religions. For Hindus, this is union with Brahman, the ultimate creative force. For Buddhists, this is nirvana, the indescribable extinction of self and freedom from suffering and attachment. For Egyptians, the good live in a lovely place in the underworld ruled by the god Osiris. For Romans, warriors and heroes were sent to paradise (the Elysian Fields), while honest citizens were sent to the Plain of Asphodel. Jews believe in a heavenlike realm of joy and fulfillment similar to where Adam and Eve originally lived. Muslims believe that heaven is a garden that affords every sensory pleasure and delights; it is a place of endless joy. Christians hold that heaven is indescribable, a mystery, but in it we will have perfect happiness because we will behold God, the Beatific Vision.



The just desserts of the wicked goes by many names depending on the religion: For Jews it’s Sheol, Gehinnom, or Gehenna; for Muslims, Sijjin, and for Christians, hell. Greeks and Romans believed that those who had offended the gods were sent to Tartarus (the Hall of Fury). Punishment is usually described in terms of fire and other



### About Sister Kathleen Glavich, SND

Jesus ordered us to make disciples of all nations and teach them. Mary Kathleen, a Sister of Notre Dame from Chardon, Ohio, responds to this call through writing, speaking, giving retreats, and teaching. Her motto, adopted from Eddie Doherty’s gravesite, is “All my words for the Word!”

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torments. According to Christians, the worst torment is being separated forever from God, the only one who can make us happy.

A word about purgatory. In Christian religions this concept is unique to Catholics. However, it has counterparts in other world religions. The cycle of rebirths is similar to purification. The Tibetan Book of the Dead explains a bardo, a forty-nine day transitional state when a person can avoid rebirth by renouncing all desires. Some Jewish traditions hold that in Gehinnom people have twelve months to repent and escape.

Whatever lies on the other side of the grave, we will all discover sooner or later. While the positions of other religions are interesting, I favor the Catholic teachings.

What other beliefs about the afterlife are you familiar with? Do you ever meditate on heaven?

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**Manny** June 21, 2017 at 8:08 am



I do contemplate heaven frequently but I really have no clue what it will be like - if I'm permitted to enter, that is. I joke that I will get to spend time (and drink a pint or two) with my beloved Shakespeare or pray with my personal patron saint, St. Catherine of Siena, as well as spend quality time with family of course, the quality time that seems so lacking here on earth. And I will have personal access to Jesus and our Blessed Mother. I picture heaven as a sort of spring time - my favorite season - but without the allergies. I kid that I'll be able to read all the great books I haven't had a chance to read on earth, and pleurably re-read the ones I



Mary Kathleen Glavich, SND [Heart to Heart with Mary](#)  
*A Yearly Devotional*

### Newest Book

In "Heart to Heart with Mary: A Yearly Devotional" Our Blessed Mother speaks to us every day of the year and a suggestion is provided for a response. It is similar to the popular book "Jesus Calling" and can be found on Amazon or purchased from me.

### Featured Book

Totally Catholic! A Catechism for Kids and Their Parents and Teachers

Do you wish you had a simple, child-friendly summary of what Catholics believe? This book took first place in the Association of Catholic Publishers awards 2014 in the category of Children's Books. It can be purchased from Pauline Books and Media or from me. (\$14.95)

### A Heavenly Book

Do you believe in angels? Most people do. The Catholic Companion to Angels offers heavenly facts about these majestic creatures, confirming that you can turn to them for help. Uniquely, The Angels comes with three covers (statue, stained-glass, or painting). Choose the one you like best.

have, and go straight to the author for what exactly he meant by this symbol or that narrative line.

But I just don't know. What does one do in eternity? How does the day go by? Do we even have wills to decide what to do? D. H. Lawrence in a particular short story used the image of flowers as analogy for heaven, flowers that were planted and just worshipped the sun. So are we like plants in forever worship position toward God? I would love to know. 😊

REPLY

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### My First Novel!

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### A Bit of Humor

A Slow Student During indoor recess, the third and fourth graders were playing school. Taking part in the game, the teacher, Sister Janet, sat at a child's desk. Adam, who was playing the teacher, came up to her and asked, "And just how many years have you been kept back?" (from "Why Is Jesus in the Microwave?")

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