



MARIAN CATECHIST APOSTOLATE  
INTERNATIONAL OFFICE  
MEMORANDUM

TO: ALL MEMBERS  
FROM: RAYMOND LEO CARDINAL BURKE, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR  
SUBJECT: THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE HUMAN SOUL AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH  
DATE: APRIL 6, 2019

**Member Question:** I am working on the *Advanced Course* – In Lesson Eleven on the Last Judgement there was a true/false question #9 “*The human soul is fully conscious when it leaves the body. True.*” I did not find this in any of the readings. Can someone point me to where this is in Church teaching? I am looking for specific Magisterial teaching that addresses this.

My reason is both professional (e.g. the course) and personal. I am a nurse and I have been observing the over sedation of people at the end of life. People used to die, many with full cognition. Now nurses hover over them with Ativan and morphine and keep patients sedated at the end of life to “ease their suffering.” Jesus told St. Faustina that he comes to people three times at their death. If they reject him, he comes again. If they reject him, he comes again. If they reject Him the third time, he allows them to go to their self-imposed disposition. My question is: **Does over medicating a patient at end of life interfere with their final choice for Christ?** I know it can interfere with salutatory repentance. **Is there a Magisterial document on this?**

**Answer:**

*Parce, Domine, parce populo Tuo.*

We must not confuse *human consciousness* with the *state of the soul*. Human consciousness has to do with our relationship with the world around us, while the soul is in direct relationship with God. Thus, even though a person may be unconscious for whatever reason, including for the reason of the administration of strong pain killers, the soul continues to relate to God. In fact, there are regularly accounts of persons who have awakened from an unconscious state and have recounted experiences of the soul, independent of human consciousness. In any case, at the moment of death, the relationship of the soul with God reaches a definitive moment called the particular judgment. The particular judgment, as the action of God with respect to the individual human soul at the moment of death, is taught in the Holy Scriptures, for example, in Lk 16, 19-31, Phil 1, 21-23, 2 Cor 5, 6-9, and Heb 9, 27, and in the Magisterium. It presupposes the full consciousness of the soul as it leaves the body at death.

The sense of the statement, “The human soul is fully conscious when it leaves the body” is found in no. 1022 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

“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.”

In the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, we read:

“The first [judgment] takes place when each one of us departs this life; for then he is instantly placed before the judgment-seat of God, where all that he has ever done or spoken or thought during life shall be subjected to the most rigid scrutiny. This is called the particular judgment” (*Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests Issued by Order of Pope Pius V*, tr. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1923), p. 81).

Pope Benedict XII dogmatically defined the truth of the particular judgment in his Constitution *Benedictus Deus* of January 29, 1336.

The concerns about the patient remaining conscious at the moment of death seem to refer to the importance of the preparation for death by *repentance for sins* committed and the *sacramental confession* of sins committed or, if that is not possible, an *act of perfect contrition*. The grace of repentance or conversion is given by God throughout life, and also in the last moments of life. This does not mean, as some have taught, that, for every man, at the last moment, through a special illumination, the place and freedom of choosing between God and the world is given, even if, without doubt, this could happen for a particular individual. The grace of repentance or conversion is communicated to the soul and demands, on the part of the soul, the assent of faith and consequent conversion. The Council of Trent declared:

“When God touches man’s heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it; and yet, without God’s grace, he cannot by his own free will move himself toward justice in God’s sight” (Council of Trent, Session VI, January 13, 1547, quoted in no. 1993 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

In caring for the dying, the Christian should be praying always that the soul receives from God the grace of conversion leading to repentance for sins and justification. Conversion and repentance takes place in the soul and is not dependent on the person being conscious. It will be helpful to study again nos. 1430-1433 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the spiritual practice of assisting others in their last moments, found in Lesson Fifteen of the *Basic Catholic Catechism Course*.

However, the moment of death, that is, the moment of the separation of the soul from the body, is definitive; “death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ” (no. 1021 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*); the trial period is over, the human will is now set either for or against God, and the soul will be in Purgatory, Heaven or Hell.

May God bless you, your family, and all your labors, especially your labors on behalf of the Marian Catechist Apostolate, and may Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego, Saint Michael the Archangel, Saints Joseph and Francis of Assisi, guide and protect you.

Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and in the Purest Heart of Saint Joseph,

Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke.

### ***Basic Catholic Catechism Course, Lesson 15 Spiritual Practices (p. 201)***

**Assist others** in their last moments. We can assist a person who is dying by:

- calling his parish priest or another available priest to administer the Last Sacraments of Penance, the Anointing of the Sick and the Holy Eucharist, and to impart the *Apostolic Pardon* with its attached indulgence.

#### ***Apostolic Pardon*** (prayed by the priest)

Through the holy mysteries of our redemption, may almighty God release you from all punishments in this life and in the life to come. May He open to you the gates of paradise and welcome you to everlasting joy. Amen. (*Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* 195).

- being present at his side to offer comfort;
- praying the *Holy Rosary* or the *Chaplet of Divine Mercy* with or for the person to ward off Satan’s final and most severe attacks;
- praying aspirations or litanies with or for him;

#### **Aspirations (a moment’s prayer):**

- God be merciful to me, a sinner.
- My God, I love Thee above all things.
- My Jesus, mercy.
- Jesus, I trust in You.

- Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me.
  - Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I love you, save souls.
  - Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.
  - Saint Joseph, model and patron of those who love the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.
- helping him to recite *Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love*;

***Act of Faith***

My God, I firmly believe that Thou art one God in Three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I believe that Thy divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which Thy Holy Catholic Church teaches, because Thou hast revealed them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

***Act of Hope***

My God, relying on Thy almighty power and infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain the pardon of my sins, the assistance of Thy grace, and life everlasting through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.

***Act of Love (Charity)***

My God, I love Thee above all things with my whole heart and soul, because Thou art all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of Thee. I forgive all who have injured me and ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

- reminding and reassuring him of God’s mercy, love and forgiveness;
- offering him a rosary, crucifix or cross to hold in order to engender sentiments of tender love and gratitude to the Lord, our crucified Savior;
- [if the person has been enrolled in the Brown Scapular, make sure he is wearing one;]
- [bless him with holy water, as well as his surroundings;]
- encouraging him to offer his suffering, in union with the suffering of Christ, for himself, other particular persons, living or dead, or for the whole Church;
- if a priest is unavailable, helping the dying person to seek a plenary indulgence by assisting him to make an act of perfect contrition with the intention of gaining final remission of all his sins and all temporal punishment due to sins;

An act of perfect contrition is an “act of love motivated by love of God for His own sake . . . we are called to help the dying to make an act of perfect contrition, reminding them of God’s mercy and assuring them of His forgiveness provided they make such an act, especially if no priest is available to give them absolution” (p. 162).

- Speaking quietly and gently, asking him to direct his thoughts to what you are saying and to pray with you, then repeating slowly and distinctly the *Act of Contrition*, even if he seems not to hear or to understand.

***Act of Contrition***

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.