

18 — Life after Death

Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to ...

- recognize that each day we make choices either to grow in our relationship with God and others or to live in isolation.
- realize that life after death is a progressive continuation of the choice made either for or against God while on earth.
- define the word heaven as a close relationship with God that continues and grows after death.
- define the word *hell* as a rejection of God that continues after death and cannot be changed.

For the Catechist

This lesson emphasizes the importance of the choices we make on earth because they determine the way we will live in eternity. That means if we live close to God on earth, we will live in His presence and grow closer to Him in eternity. That concept might be difficult for adolescents to worry about because they have been programmed by our culture to "live in the moment" and forget about tomorrow. They live with instant messages, immediate responses, and constant interaction. This lesson is asking them to think about eternity with God. The reality is that they are not even thinking about choices that might affect the next day—even the next minute!

Adding to this confusion is the fact that popular culture presents images of heaven and hell in pictures of clouds, fire, harps, and spears. Regretfully, rarely do the students hear about the known reality told in Scripture: *heaven* refers to the presence of a relationship with God and *hell* refers to the absence of a relationship with God.

Literalists tend to treat the popular culture images as realistic and may reject the reality with the imagery from Scripture. Throughout this lesson help students distinguish between these two levels of thought. Hopefully, they will accept the reality of a relationship with God as they set aside the picture of harp-playing angels. Help them believe that the way they live on earth will determine their relationship with God after death. Help them realize that they are in control of whether they spend their eternity in heaven with God or in hell without God—forever!

Materials Needed

Opening Prayer: Vesper folder

Review: Easel or wall pad markers with the objectives listed

Introduction: Introduction worksheets or poster board with circles, pens or pencils

Guided Reading: student text, pens, pencils, paper

Vespers: Folders, prayer sheets, tape or glue, scissors

Activity A: "Journal," and Journal folders and pens or pencils

Closing Prayer: Vespers folders

1. Opening Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner and distribute the Vespers folders.
- Ask one student to choose the opening prayer.

2. Review

Review the main points of the previous lesson:

- Death is the result of evil.
- Christ defeated death through His Resurrection.
- Death, although not of God, is our way to further union with Him.
- We look forward to death and our future life with assurance of our life in God.
- We pray for those who have died because we believe our prayers will help them attain their final state of triumph on the Last Day.

3. Introduction

- Use the Introduction worksheet to help the students think about the way they spend their time. Ask them to answer the questions on the bottom of the second sheet.
- After about 5-7 minutes, ask the students if anyone wants to share any of their answers.

Supplemental Activity—Work as a group to encourage discussion:

- Have the two large circles drawn on poster board.
- Ask the students as a group to divide the circles according to what most people their age choose to do and what they should do.
- As a group answer the questions at the bottom of the second page. Encourage the students to think about all young people.

4. Guided Reading, Pages 90

Read this section and ask the students to share any new ideas they learned about life after death.

Ask: *Do they think most people worry about how the way they are living today affects their life after death?* [Encourage all students to answer.]

Background Reading (Eternal Life)

"While we trust that God will lead us from life through death to eternal life, we do not know the specifics of how this will happen. Any imagery of life after death, the resurrection and judgement is simply that—imagery. It reveals something, yet conceals more. Anything further, no matter how much we might like to know it, will only be revealed when we are in God's presence, for God's way of dealing with us is by calling us to follow Him in faith, not because clear pathways are marked out for us, or because we are shown visions of what awaits us after death. It is for this reason that He 'has not permitted that anyone ever come from there and speak to the living about what is beyond. By this He teaches us to hold the Divine Scriptures to be more trustworthy than anything else' (St. John Chrysostom, Fourth Homily on Lazarus and the Rich Man).

"And so, while God reveals Himself and makes known to us hidden realities we could not otherwise imagine, our reflecting on Him both starts and ends in mystery. We cannot know His divine essence because He is beyond our understanding. We cannot even know our own destiny, except that it is tied up with Him" (*With Eyes of Faith* 103).

Guided Reading, Pages 91

- Read this section aloud.
- Divide the group into groups of 3 or 4 students. Ask them to write a modern version of the story of the rich man or whatever person they want as the main character who is tormented in heaven for not having a relationship with God and other people on earth.
- Have the group share their story by reading it or acting out the scenes.

5. Ancient Wisdom for Today

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the information on this page. Have the students write their answers to the questions and share them with the class.

[*Suggestions: We are set apart for an eternal existence because God is eternal and we are made in God's image; we are to believe in God's power and to follow God's law if we want to enjoy everlasting life.*]

6. Icon Study

- Have the students read the commentary on the Sunday of All Saints icon.
- Ask each student to name a saint with whom they are familiar—they might pray to a definite Saint or the Saint for whom they were named.
- Ask them if it is difficult for them to think about living as a Saint as God asks us to. Let them share who helps them lead a saintly life?

7. Vespers

- Have the students read the information about the troparion.
- Distribute the Vespers folder.
- Give each student one copy of the Resurrection Troparion (see page 138 where 3 copies are on one page).
- Ask the students to tape or glue this Troparion onto a new page in their Vespers folder. [More troparia will be added eventually.]

Background Reading (Heaven and Hell)

"The essence of heaven is union with God, in whom we find our perfection. Being made in God's image, we attain salvation in becoming as much like God as possible. Though we can never know God as He is in Himself, we can come continually closer to Him who deifies us. The future kingdom is the fulfillment of our destiny as humanity and as individuals. In it we are perfected by constant growth in union, knowledge and love of God.

"Comparably, the most terrible aspect of hell is eternal separation from God, the Creator and Lover of Mankind, in whom we could have found our perfection. No torment could be any greater than this loss. Jesus used the image of Gehenna to describe the state of those who were condemned, for it combined the idea of rejection and of punishment. He called it the 'everlasting fires prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mt 25:41), and the 'fiery furnace where there is wailing and the gnashing of teeth' (Mt 13:42, a sign of despair.

"The possibility of salvation also implies the possibility of failure or condemnation. God created us in His image and likeness as free beings with autonomy of action and that carries with it the risk of failure. Our freedom is real, and the consequences of our free choices are likewise real. Union with God always remains a possibility as long as we have free will" (*LLI* 62).

8. Activity A: My Personal Journal

Distribute Worksheet A along with pens or pencils. Have the students complete the worksheet in silence (or you can play religious music if available) and place it in their folder. Plan accordingly, but they should need no more than 5 minutes to complete the journal entry.

9. Summary

Review the lesson. Ask if they are any further comments or questions about today's topics.

10. Closing Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner.
- Pray the Resurrection Troparion.
- Ask the student to go to the first page in their folder and pray from "O Most Holy Trinity" to "Our Father." Encourage anyone who has memorized these prayers to pray without looking at their folders.

Resurrection Troparion

(Tone 2)

When You descended to death, O Immortal Life, * You destroyed the Abyss by the radiance of Your divinity. * And when You raised the dead from the depths of the earth, * all the heavenly Powers cried out: * "O Giver of Life, Christ our God, glory be to



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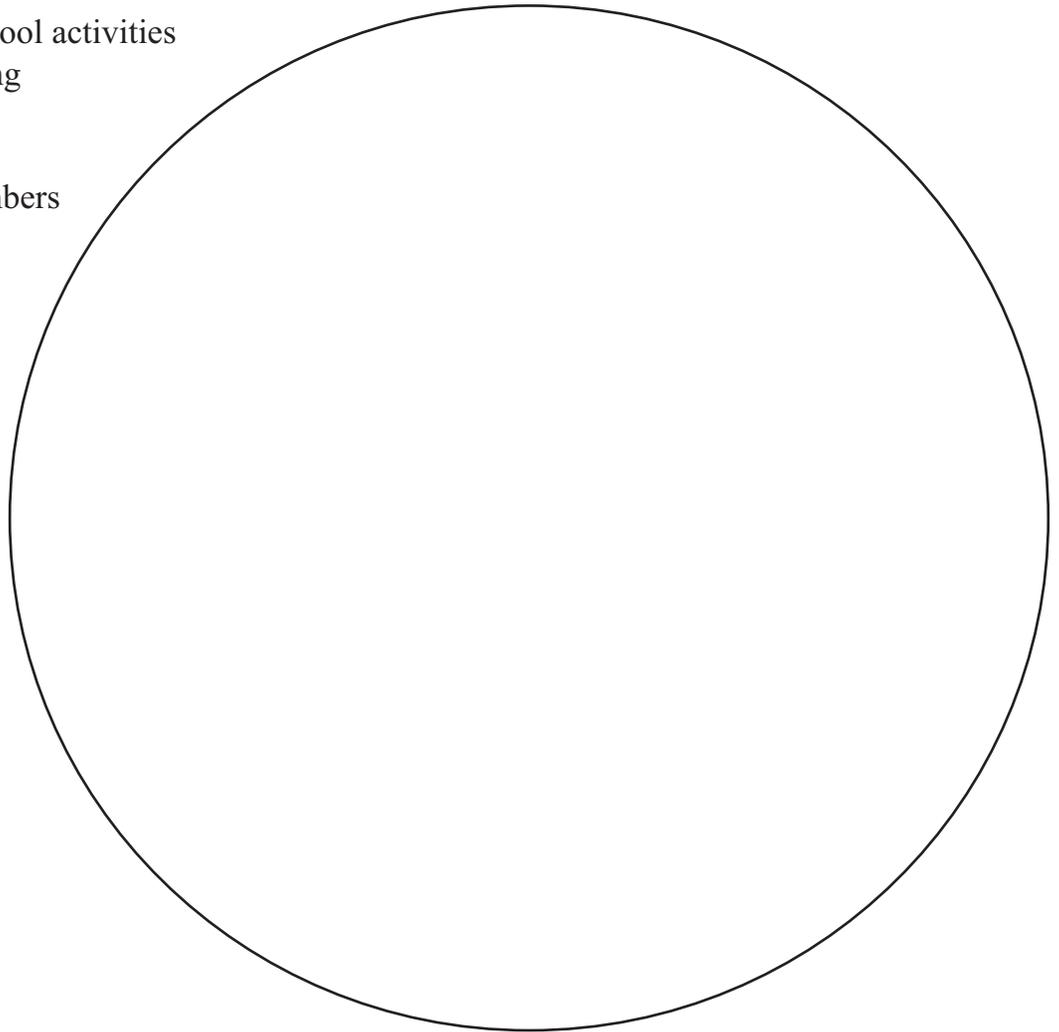
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Personal Reflection

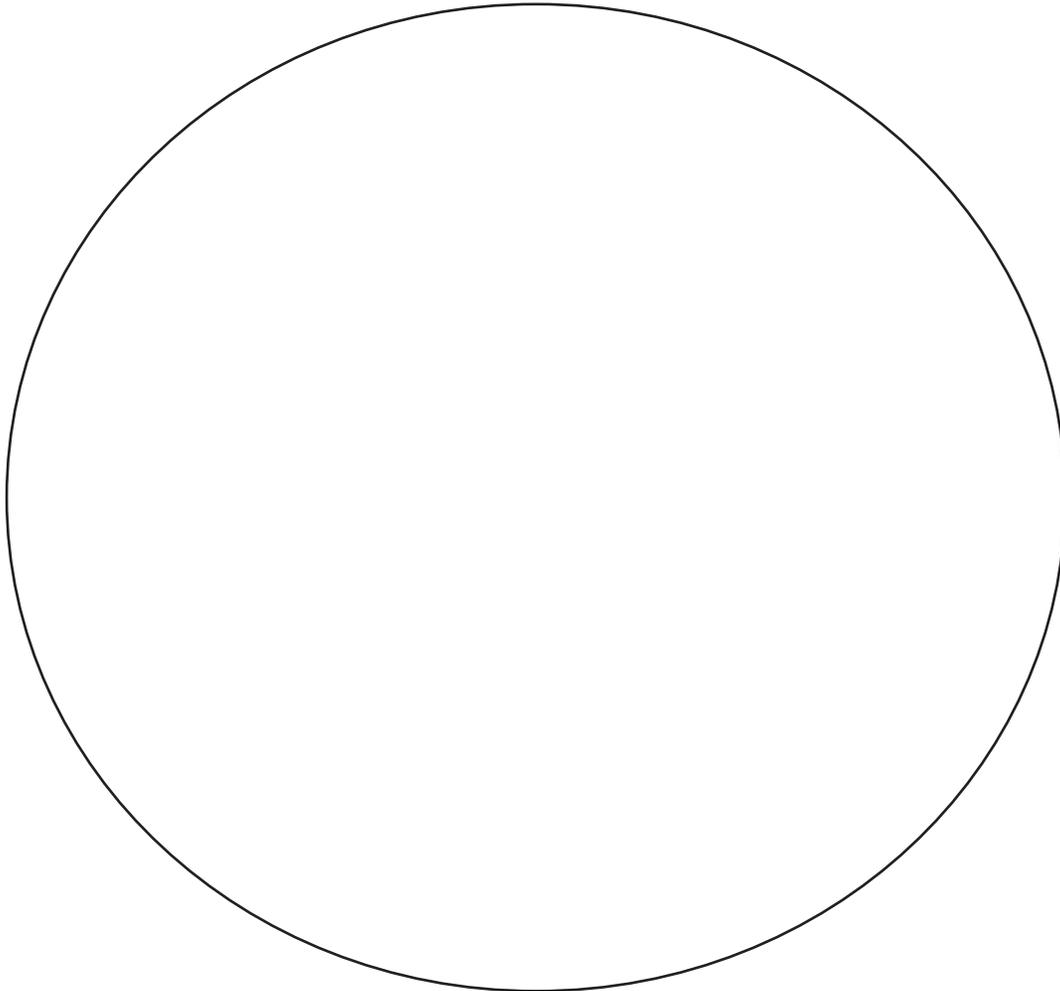
A person's attitude toward the present life determines where he or she spends life after death. Think of the circle below as comparable to an average day in your life. Divide the circle and label the sections to show how you spend your time. Some ideas might include the following:

- texting
- talking on the phone
- participating in after-school activities
- complaining or quarreling
- listening to music
- surfing the internet
- talking with family members
- talking with friends
- praying
- helping other people
- sleeping
- eating
- being in school



From the above, I learned that.....

Look at the circle you already divided. What time slots need to be changed. Why? Divide the circle below to include those changes which you feel are necessary.



Answer the following:

1. If I were to die tomorrow, my life would have stood for

2. When I do die, I would like to have had my life stand for

3. I can live my life more fully in Christ by

4. I know that I choose my relationship with God and heaven when I

5. I know I choose to turn away from God and heaven when I

My Personal Journal

In a play by Jean Anouilh, the Last Judgment is portrayed. All of the supposedly "good" people are pushing toward the gate of heaven, eager to receive their just reward.

There were those who shame-facedly stood far off, realizing that they were unworthy sinners who were deserving of punishment.

A rumor starts spreading that all were to be forgiven; all were to enter into the glory of God.

"How could He do that?"

"If I would have only known this!"

"It's not fair!"

Consider yourself one of the good people. Write your response.

The play continues:

Anger rose and the supposedly "good people" began to curse God. At that moment they damned themselves.

Why did the "good people" curse God, and how did that cause them to get damned?

Write your reactions.

Write an entry for Facebook or text someone telling the news. Consider warning them on how they should live if they want to get into heaven.
