

Unit 3: Life and Death

Theme 1: Catholic teaching on the meaning of death

Death is part of human experience and humans have explored what death means. People have different beliefs about what death means: some see death as the end. Christians believe that at death life is 'changed not ended'. St Paul writes that the perishable body cannot inherit the imperishable heaven & 'We will not all sleep, but we will be changed.' This means death transforms us into a new life of the soul for eternity with God. This is due to Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection. His resurrection meant he defeated death & Christians hope they will be with him for eternity in heaven.

What do Catholics mean by 'dying well'?

For Catholics near death, it is important to **prepare for death**: spending time with family, ensuring their will is up to date, discussion about their funeral. If they are in pain: **palliative care** to reduce their pain in the final stages of life.

Respect the value of their life until their natural death: this means Catholics reject euthanasia & assisted suicide. They instead support & promote hospice care when medical cures are no longer possible.

Provide rituals to support the dying: funeral rite expresses belief, imagery & symbols of eternal life. Prayers are offered.

What is palliative care?

Palliative care is the use of medication to reduce the pain of an illness before death. This may be a long span of time in conditions such as cancer or a degenerative condition (e.g. motor neurone disease). It enables the patient to retain dignity and quality of life in its last stages. This often takes place in a hospice. Pope St. John Paul wrote in his encyclical 'Evangelium Vitae' in 1995 that palliative care is appropriate and good because it allows people to say no to treatment which is painful or difficult & allows people to maintain their dignity and some quality of life.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide – these are both ways to end a patient's life before its 'natural end'.

Euthanasia = 'good death'.

Assisted suicide = an individual seeks help to end their life because they cannot do so themselves.

- Both are currently **illegal in the UK**. Pope St John Paul said in Evangelium Vitae 'I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person.' This comes from the belief we are all made in God's image & life is a gift from God from conception to a natural death.

Euthanasia is wrong because:

- ☐ The 6th commandment says "**do not murder**"
- ☐ **Sanctity of Life**: God creates life so it is up to him when he takes it away
- ☐ So killing someone is playing at being God

Catholics are against Euthanasia but they say that a doctor can give pain relief even if this does shorten the life of that person (**Double Effect**). However the patient must be able to prepare for death – e.g. confess their sins and receive the last rites.

What do Catholics believe are the alternatives to euthanasia? → palliative care. Suffering does have a purpose in helping u to learn about ourselves and others and learn about the human condition. Others would look at Jesus' suffering at his crucifixion. Pope St John Paul did say 'such heroic behaviour cannot be considered a duty for everyone.'

Is there a right to die?

Beliefs about this hinge on 2 arguments:

1. **Sanctity of life**: religious argument of God having the only right over our life. Jews, Christians & Muslims all believe in this principle. They believe compassion should be shown to the dying person, so they retain their dignity.

2. **Quality of life** –Should a person with low quality of life have the right to die? E.g. severe disability/illness This is difficult to measure.

Other Christians would look to the words of Jesus in the Golden Rule: 'Treat others as you would wish to be treated' (Mt7:12) & also 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' Euthanasia under such circumstances would be a loving thing to do. Such campaigners seek to have voluntary euthanasia legalised in the UK.

Catholics also argue against euthanasia and assisted suicide because of 3 main premises:

- a. **Slippery slope argument:** would people be pressurised into committing euthanasia if it were legalised in the UK?
- b. **Quality of life** – numerous examples of people have lived valuable lives despite difficult circumstances
- c. **Who decides 'quality of life'?** - might disabled people or others feel pressured if an outside group decides they have 'poor quality of life', but they themselves feel their life is fulfilled and meaningful?

What do Humanists say about this issue?

Humanists would argue it is up to the individual to decide whether they should continue their life or not. They do not reject palliative care but argue in favour of euthanasia and assisted suicide as a choice.

- ➔ Look back at your notes for your thoughts on this issue. What did you learn about the case of the man from Melksham, Tony Nicklinson?

1. Begins with the Easter story: Christ's resurrection present in the 4 gospels: Jesus was raised body & soul, so we can be raised too.

Catholics believe humans will also experience this resurrection of the body.

2. St. Paul writes of his conversion experience on the road to Damascus & wrote letters to the early Christian communities around the Mediterranean. It was believed Jesus would return soon, so the writings refer to **'Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.'** (St. Paul)

Theme 2: What do Catholics believe about life after death? (→ see the link to Faure's requiem in theme 6)

3. Gradually, this imminent eschatology was replaced with the understanding that there was a responsibility to live now in the light of the resurrection & to prepare for eternal life by resisting evil and doing good. The Lord's Prayer relates this transformative power of the Holy Spirit: 'Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.'

Catholics believe their body will experience a bodily resurrection at the Parousia. St Paul's writings show us what this will be like: **'And just have we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.'** (1Cor 15:49). Our bodies will be transformed into sharing Christ's divine life and likeness. Our soul will be in our body, too.

Catholics believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb is a feature of all 4 gospels. St Paul sees Jesus' resurrection as the beginning of our resurrection: **'Christ has been raised from the dead as the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep.'** This is a matter of faith, which cannot be proven or disproved. **At the Second Coming of Christ, the Parousia,** everything will be transformed and history itself will end. St Paul describes this as a new era for God's kingdom, when 'God will be all in all.' → What do you think about this?

Other theories about Jesus' resurrection have been offered: his body was stolen. Jesus' body was revived after his crucifixion – he didn't really die. The Da Vinci Code book posited the theory the ointments placed on Jesus' body could have revived him → however, John's Gospel relates blood and water flowing from Jesus' side, indicating hypovolemic shock, a sign of fatal violence (death).

Other beliefs about life after death:

Some Christians believe death is the end of the body and only the soul lives on. They might use NDE's as evidence of this. Others use the separation of body and soul (dualism) to explain reincarnation: the soul is placed in another body. This is a Buddhist or Hindu belief. Others would say death is the end of a human life.

Other Christians believe that unless you are a Christian, you go to Hell. Others believe that all people go to Heaven, and that there are different levels to Heaven. Other Christians believe the body & soul stay in the grave until the Resurrection.

Theme 3: Beliefs about 'Eschatology' : (Christian beliefs about what will happen at the 'end times')

Catholics believe in the Four Last Things: 'death, judgement, heaven and hell.' The New Testament has several stories told by Jesus that refer to a judgement being made about how people lived their lives...

- **Look back at your work on the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant & the Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus** : who was involved? What happened? Give a key quote from the parable.. What do we learn about judgement, heaven and hell from this parable?
- Catholic teaching about judgement comes from this Christian understanding that each individual will be held to account by God for the things they do, or fail to do, in their lives.
- **Heaven**: beatific vision; a place of eternal happiness in the presence of God. Indescribable. Totally at one with God.
- **Hell**: place of punishment for those who reject God through their own free will. The person in the parables above rejects the compassion, love and mercy of God. Imagery of fire and punishment has been used to describe this place we cannot fully understand.
- Catholics also believe in **General Judgement** (final judgement as shown in the Parable of the Sheep & Goats). **Particular Judgement** = at death, when the soul is judged for the actions of the body. This has 3 possible outcomes: divine blessing of heaven/ soul needs purifying → purgatory/ individual utterly rebels against God → hell
- What is **purgatory**? Meaning 'to purge 'of our sins before we enter heaven. We call it a 'state of hope' rather than a place. We remember the Holy Souls in November and pray for them – they cannot pray for themselves. St Paul says of purgatory: 'it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.'
- **Protestant Christians would not accept the idea of purgatory. They simply believe people either accept or reject God and either go to heaven or hell based on this relationship.**

So... The main difference in belief is over the Catholic Christian understanding of Purgatory. This means:

1. A Catholic belief. Purgatory is a state of purification to achieve the holiness necessary to enter heaven. It is outside of time

2. A soul in purgatory knows it is going to heaven. A soul in purgatory cannot pray for itself, but relies on the prayers of living Catholics.



3. In Medieval times, people would leave money for after their death so prayers and masses could be said for their souls to shorten their time in purgatory.

Pope John Paul II wrote in 1999: 'Before we enter into God's Kingdom, every trace of sin within us must be eliminated, every imperfection in our soul corrected. This is exactly what takes place in purgatory.' So... purgatory is a state of being, not a physical place.

The Catholic Church has 3 distinct sources of authority to support its teaching about Christian beliefs:

1. **Bible as the Word of God** – all writers of the Bible were inspired by Holy Spirit → this same spirit continues to work through the Church today.
2. **Theologians** have explained beliefs to the Christian community – this is called 'Tradition' and continues today.
3. The leaders of the church – its Popes and Bishops are called the '**Magisterium**'. As Jesus gave the mandate 'make disciples of all nations', Catholics believe this can be traced back from the present day to the time of Jesus. This is called 'Apostolic Succession' & is why the Pope & Bishops have the authority to make statements about the Catholic faith.

Ordinary Magisterium: comprised of Popes & Bishops. They share their preaching via letters to the faithful, homilies. Popes write documents called 'encyclicals' (e.g. Laudato Si by Pope Francis). These present Catholic teaching in a modern context e.g. IVF/environment/marriage

Vatican II: This was the most recent General Council 1962-1965. 4 key documents out of the 16 published were called 'Constitution' – meaning they were the most important. They were: Dei Verbum/Sacrosanctum Concilium/Lumen Gentium/Gaudium et Spes → How did these documents influence Catholic practices? Look back at your class notes:

Theme 4: The Magisterium of the Catholic Church – what is it?

Extraordinary Magisterium: in 2 parts: It means out of the ordinary. It is the calling of a General (Ecumenical) Council. This is the Conciliar Magisterium. The Council is convened/called up, presided over and approved by the Pope. 2. The Extraordinary Magisterium takes the form of Papal infallibility → what does this mean? Why is it important?

Task box: What is Vatican Council II? Who called it?

What was the aim of Vatican Council II?

List the changes brought by the Vatican Council

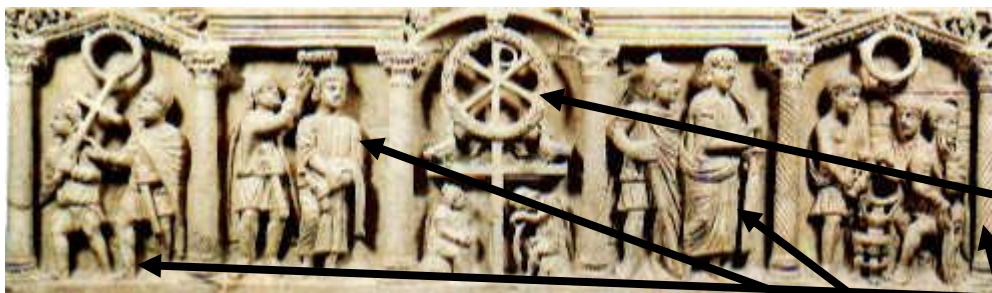
Theme 5: Artefacts:

How Christian beliefs about eternal life are portrayed in certain artefacts

How Christian beliefs about resurrection are expressed through the use of the Paschal candle at Easter & at Catholic baptism

An artefact is an object made by humans. They often use image and symbol to convey a deeper meaning and express a belief.

Artefact 1: Sarcophagi: the tomb as a place of hope. These are stone coffins that have carved images on them. The images often feature scenes from the Bible or saints' lives. The example below has scenes from Jesus' Passion (last days) & is in the Vatican museum, Rome.



Notice the Chi-Rho symbol in each side of the sarcophagus. This symbol represents Jesus' triumph over sin and death.

Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus' cross.

Jesus is crowned with thorns

Jesus presented for trial before Pilate.

Pilate washes his hands.



The symbol for Ordinary Time

- The Chi- Rho is a Christian symbol usually associated with the liturgical season of ordinary Time.
- It consists of the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ or Christos (anointed one). The Hebrew equivalent is Messiah.
- The letters that make up the Chi-Rho are: Chi =X and the letter Rho =P
- The fusion of these two letters into an abbreviation became a symbol for Christ also known as labarum or monogram of Constantine.
- This symbol was adopted as an emblem by Constantine.



The main events of Jesus' passion are:

Garden of Gethsemane: where Jesus prayed for strength to face his passion. He was arrested here.

Two trials (some say 3): Appeared before the Jewish authorities. Then tried before Pilate. Then tried before the crowd.

Suffering: Pilate ordered Jesus to be whipped, hit and had a crown of thorns made and placed on his head.

Crucifixion: cruel & painful death. On the cross for 6 hours. Soldiers checked he had died & then he was placed in a tomb.

What is the Paschal Candle? From CatholicNewsAgency.com:

- The Paschal candle represents Christ, the Light of the World.
- The pure beeswax of which the candle is made represents the sinless Christ who was formed in the womb of His Mother. The wick signifies His humanity, the flame, His Divine Nature, both soul and body.
- Five grains of incense inserted into the candle in the form of a cross recall the aromatic spices with which His Sacred Body was prepared for the tomb, and of the five wounds in His hands, feet, and side.
- During the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night the priest or deacon carries the candle in procession into the dark church. A new fire, symbolizing our eternal life in Christ, is kindled which lights the candle. The candle, representing Christ himself, is blessed by the priest who then inscribes in it a cross, the first letters and last of the Greek alphabet, (Alpha and Omega 'the beginning and the end') and the current year, as he chants the prayer below; then affixes the five grains of incense.
- The Easter candle is lighted each day during Mass throughout the Paschal season until Ascension Thursday.

1. Why do Christians think this is important?

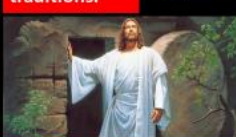
2. Just how important to Christians is it/ should it be?

'From Death to Life':

The Paschal Candle in Catholic Services

Explain the Paschal candle's significance in relation to these Christian beliefs/traditions.

1. Deliverance (Psch – Pschl Latin)



3. Easter Vigil

Explain why a paschal candle is used during the Easter Vigil and at a Catholic Baptism. AO1 [8]

- Candidates could include some or all of the following, but other relevant points should be credited:
- At Easter the flame of the paschal candle symbolizes the eternal presence of Christ, light of the world in the midst of his people
- It also highlights Jesus' role as the Second Person of the Trinity, the Alpha and Omega
- The paschal candle is sometimes referred to as the "Easter candle" or the "Christ candle." (The term "paschal" comes from the word Pesach, which in Hebrew means Passover, and relates to the paschal mystery of salvation)
- It is used in Baptism to signify the Holy Spirit and fire that John the Baptist promised to those who were baptised in Christ
- During the baptismal rite, a small candle lit from the paschal candle is given to the newly baptised by a member of the community, along with the words 'Receive the Light of Christ'

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE?

LIGHT
The light of Christ that shines in the darkness.

FIRE
It represents Christ's resurrection.

GRAINS OF INCENSE
They represent the 5 wounds of Christ.

ALPHA AND OMEGA
Christ is the beginning and end of all things.

CROSS
It represents Christ and his eternal light.

YEAR
It reminds us of God's presence here and now.

Source: Aleteia.com



Theme 6: Music and the funeral rite

How does music help you? Many Christians find music can help them to pray and express themselves. Christians use live music in their worship & community life, & recorded music in their individual prayer. Did you know the psalms are in fact songs? Jesus & his fellow Jews would have been very familiar with King David's psalms. They express emotions from anxiety to despair, joy and praise & were used in prayer. Monks & nuns used them to build on these types of prayer to form their daily set prayer times. These were chanted or sung (e.g. Gregorian chant) & are still used today. In the Catholic Mass, the psalms are used and sung in the Liturgy of the Word

How is music used in the liturgy? There are different opinions about music in the mass: some would prefer Latin. Some Catholics would prefer traditional hymns, whilst others prefer younger style worship songs in order to appeal to younger people. **What do you think & why is this important?**

These elements are sung in the Mass:

Alleluia to welcome the Gospel and to show its importance.

Eucharistic acclamations: this includes the 'holy, holy', 'Great Amen' & 'Memorial acclamations: they can be sung in a variety of styles and help to punctuate the solemn moments of the Mass.

Gloria: song of praise & wonder to God.

Hymns: think about where we sing hymns and why. → entrance, offertory, Holy Communion, and recessional – all key moments as a people and to support our prayers as a community.

See the link to Theme 2 above: Catholic beliefs about eternal life: Faure's requiem

Listen to Faure's requiem, composed at the time of the death of his parents, he described it as 'a lullaby of death', where death was something peaceful 'rather than as a painful experience.' It demonstrates not only sadness but also hope of eternal life with God. For instance, Faure used sopranos to sound like angels and harps and violins. One famous element in the piece is 'in paradisum', sung as the body leaves the church. The words are 'May the angels lead you into paradise; may the martyrs receive your arrival and lead you to the holy city of Jerusalem. May choirs of angels receive you & with Lazarus, once poor, may you have eternal rest.'

The funeral mass:

New information: Catholic funerals

5. The committal: At the grave side, prayers are read, incense is used and holy water is sprinkled.

4. Coffin is sprinkled with holy water and led out of Church whilst prayers are read.



3. Funeral mass: The funeral usually happens within a Mass. Their life story (eulogy) is read. Everyone honours the deceased person by bowing to the coffin after Holy Communion.

1. Anointing of the sick & confession are received by a Catholic before death. This strengthens & cleanses you from sin. It is spiritual & physical healing.

2. There is a vigil beside the dying person & when they have passed away.

- If someone is on their deathbed, a priest will prepare them for death. This is most likely after a long period of illness. Prayers of preparation and reconciliation may be said, with only the minister in the room. For Catholics, this takes the form of the Sacrament of the Sick, which includes confession, absolution, anointing and holy communion. Family and friends can participate in the Lord's Prayer, the Word of God and Holy Communion.
- Often, the deceased will have left information in his/her will concerning what they want to be included in the funeral service (hymns, prayers) and will also say whether they wanted to be buried or cremated.

Part of the funeral	How it shows Catholic beliefs about eternal life
Covering the coffin with the pall	The pall is a white cloth – reminder of Baptism & being washed clean of original sin. Pall also reminds us all are equal before God. Everyone is worthy of Christ's salvation
Putting the book of the Gospel on the coffin	Reminder that Christians live by Jesus' teachings → live like him & have eternal life. Cross is placed on the coffin → shows Christ's victory over death that we also share now. Paschal candle is also placed beside the coffin → symbol of the resurrection.
The use of incense	Used at the end of the funeral: honours the person, that their body was a temple of the Holy Spirit. Incense also represents the prayers of the people rising to God.
Sprinkling holy water over the coffin	This is a symbolic action → reminder of baptism.
The sermon/homily	Brings comfort to the family & friends and explains Jesus defeated death.
Prayers that refer to Jesus' life and death	Will refer to Baptism, promise of eternal life & the resurrection, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross & the hope Christians have of eternal life with God.
The priest wearing white or purple	If they wear white, it means the funeral is happening in Easter or the priest has chosen to wear this colour to speak of the hope of the resurrection, or the priest selects purple as a colour of mourning

Theme 7: Prayer within Catholic communities.

What is prayer? The Catechism defines it as '.. the raising of the heart and mind to God, or the petition of good things from him in accord with his will.' Regular prayer deepens the relationship with God. It has different forms for different occasions:

Adoration: to acknowledge God is worthy of all praise. This might be silence, or adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. The sign of the cross is a form of prayerful adoration.

Thanksgiving: People give thanks for the good things God has provided or done for them. The word Eucharist also means 'thanksgiving' in Greek – the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the Mass gives thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus in his death and resurrection.

Repentance: when Christians regret past actions and seek God's forgiveness. In the Mass this is the penitential rite (Lord have mercy). Catholics also seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Intercession: At every mass, we pray for the needs of others in the bidding prayers. At home, we may also ask God to help others.

Petition: Individual Christians will ask God to help them. They will 'petition' God to respond to their own needs.

Extempore prayer

A free-form prayer without text. It may or may not reflect a stream of consciousness of prayer by the one who prays. Considerable preparation may have taken place before the prayer was offered, or the prayer may be a spontaneous expression. Extempore prayer is distinguished from prayers which are read or memorized.



Task: study the Lord's prayer picture below. Explain why this prayer is important to Christians.

Formulaic prayer:

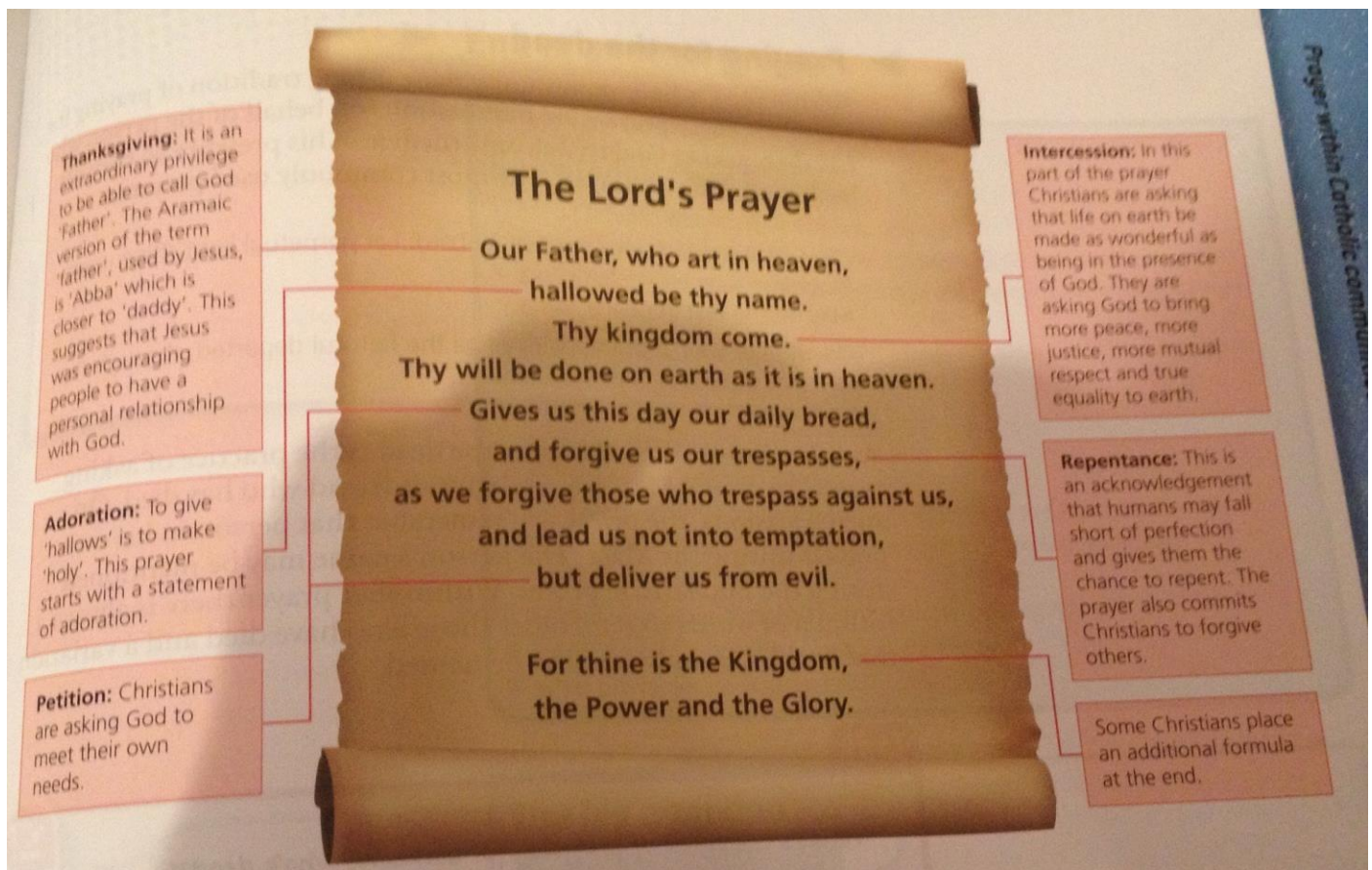
Many Christians use prayers that have been written down over the centuries. This is because they know the people who wrote them were close to God and this will help them in their prayer life. These prayers are inspirational: e.g. the Lord's prayer, Glory Be & Hail Mary. The rosary is another example. The most famous formulaic prayer is the Lord's prayer, because Jesus gave this to his followers in order to teach them how to pray.. Others are simple: 'Jesus, I love you.'

Understanding why Catholics pray for the dead:

This is a long tradition, which intercedes for those who have died, asking God to welcome them into his presence so they can have eternal life with him in heaven. In November, especially, we say the following prayer:

'Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen.'

Additionally, we may ask a priest to offer Mass for a relative or friend who has died. That person's name will be mentioned in the Mass during the Eucharistic prayer and the priest will remember the person in his prayers during the Mass.



Exam questions: Life and Death

a. What do Catholics mean by 'the Magisterium'? (2)

a. What is meant by the term 'heaven'? (2)

a. What is meant by the term 'death'? (2)

b. Describe how music makes a difference to worship. (5)

b. Describe the features of a Catholic funeral. (5)

b. Describe the Catholic Church's beliefs humans and their relationship with creation. (5)

c. Explain Catholic teaching on heaven and hell. (8)

c. Explain what Catholics believe about the soul after death. (8)

c. Explain what Jesus' teachings tell us about judgement. (8)

c. Explain how Catholic beliefs about judgement, heaven and hell influence the lives of individual Catholics. (8)

c. Explain the importance of prayer for Catholics. (8)

who? – which groups: Jews/Christians

what – are their different beliefs?

Why – do they hold these differences in belief?

How – do they practise this?

(C) Explain why the Paschal candle is used in the Easter Vigil and during a Catholic baptism. (8)

d. 'People should have the right to end their lives.' ' Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer) (15)

d. 'Death is the end of existence. After we die we're just gone' Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer). (15)

d. 'The words and teachings of the Pope have little relevance for Catholics today.' Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view. (15)

d. 'Funerals are happy events for Catholics.' Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer). (15)

d. 'Prayer is a waste of time.' Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer). (15)

d. 'There is no life after death.' Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer). (15)