

Hell

The Church teaches that we are created for communion with God, but that communion is never forced. It must be freely chosen, because love by its nature requires freedom. When a person freely and knowingly turns away from God through serious sin—against God, neighbor, or self—they place themselves outside the life for which they were created. Scripture speaks very clearly about the seriousness of this choice. St. John says, “Whoever does not love remains in death” (1 John 3:14–15). Jesus himself warns that we are accountable for how we respond to the needs of the poor and the vulnerable, who are his brothers and sisters. To refuse love in a consistent and final way is to refuse communion with God.

The Church describes hell as the definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed. It is not something God imposes on anyone, but the tragic possibility of a free and permanent rejection of his mercy. Jesus uses strong images—such as Gehenna and “unquenchable fire”—to remind us of the seriousness of turning away from conversion and refusing his invitation to life (cf. Matthew 13:41–42). The Church affirms the reality of hell and its eternity. The deepest pain of this state is not imagery or physical description, but eternal separation from God—the One in whom alone we find life, meaning, and fulfillment. It is the loss of the communion for which we were created.

At the same time, this teaching is not meant to create fear, but to call us to responsibility and conversion. Jesus calls us to “enter through the narrow gate” (Matthew 7:13–14) and to live with awareness that our choices matter and that our life is meant to be lived in light of eternity.

The Church is also clear that God predestines no one to hell. Hell is the result of a willful and persistent refusal of God’s grace. For this reason, the Church never ceases to pray for mercy. In the Eucharist and in the daily prayer of the faithful, the Church entrusts every person to God’s desire that all be saved and come to repentance.