

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA
Who Art in Heaven

Catechist Preparation

Clarifying the Essentials

Because Heaven defies exact description and precise understanding, Sacred Scripture speaks of it in images.

- Heaven is total union with the Blessed Trinity along with Mary, the angels, the Apostles, the saints, and all the blessed (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1024).
- Biblical images describe Heaven as life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, and the heavenly Jerusalem (see CCC 1027).

Christ bridges the gap between God and us and opens the way for us to enter Heaven, where God resides in the fullness of his glory and where God reigns eternally.

- The life of the faithful in Heaven comes as a gift accomplished by our Redemption in Christ (see CCC 1026).
- The saving and redemptive work of Christ consists in his Cross, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension (see CCC 2795).

Why Is This Important?

Heaven is our hope, our goal. We are to strive for Heaven. At the same time that we are heading in that blessed direction, we already belong to it, as citizens graced by the saving sacrifice of Christ. We may be away from our homeland now but our homeland awaits us. God himself dwells in our hearts and fuels the desire we have for total and perfect union with the Blessed Trinity.

But do not think of [heaven] spatially, as if birds are nearer to God than we. It is not written that "the Lord is closer to tall people" or "nearer to those who live on higher hills." For it is written, "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit," namely, close to those who are humble.

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Doctrinal Session Guide

(Approximately 60 minutes)

Arrange chairs in a circle. Place in the center a candle, an open Bible, a rosary, and prayer booklets.

Welcome

Greet people as they arrive. Check in with everyone to find out how they are doing.

Pray

Encourage people to place themselves in the presence of God. Proclaim Isaiah 25:9.

Engage

1. Have the participants write down their current understanding of what Heaven is. Invite them to share their responses with one other person. After a few minutes, share some responses. Then ask, *When you hear the words "Our Father, who art in heaven," what does this suggest to you?* Invite them to share their responses with one other person.
2. Continue with the **Insight** and **For Reflection** sections of the participant handout.

Teach

1. Explain that God is not limited to time or space. God can manifest himself anywhere, yet we speak of God's home as Heaven. Heaven is not a physical space but a state of being. For the faithful, Heaven is being fully united with God for all eternity. Christ has opened the "gates of heaven" for us and to us by the Paschal Mystery.
2. Also explain that in Baptism, we become adopted children of God and heirs of Heaven—the home of God and our homeland. Heaven beckons us because God created us to be with him.
3. Discuss the **Church Teaching** section.

Apply

Encourage the participants to complete this statement: *From the prayer, discussion, and study for this topic, I understand the essence of this Church teaching to be . . .*

Pray

Invite everyone to close their eyes and to talk to God in the quiet of their heart about their desire to be with him forever in Heaven.