

Hell is Real and Many are Headed There

by Matthew McDonald

Many Catholics underestimate the power of hell and the possibility they may end up there, pastor and author Msgr. Charles Pope said. He said 21 of 38 parables in the Gospels are about hell (often referred to as Gehenna) – including the rich man and Lazarus, the wise and foolish virgins, the weeds and the wheat, and the sheep and the goats. “Nobody loves you and me more than Jesus, and yet nobody spoke of hell more than Jesus,” he told Raymond Arroyo on his EWTN television show *The World Over* on April 3.

Msgr. Pope, 64, a priest of the archdiocese of Washington, is the author of a new book called *The Hell There Is: An Exploration of an Often-Rejected Doctrine of the Church*, published by Tan Books and available at EWTN Religious Catalogue. “Jesus warns that many are on the wrong path. And we have got to stop and make a decision and be more urgent about this thing in our life,” he said.

“And if I can say one thing about the Church today, we don’t have any sense of urgency,” he added. “Everyone [assumes] ‘The deal is done; who needs to be saved? We are already – it’s already taken care of.’ And that is not true.” Even many daily Mass goers reject hell, he said, which he chalked up to what he called “a cultural trend where I think we’ve reduced love to mere kindness.” It is possible for people to go to hell because people are free to choose God or reject God, he said.

“You can’t force people to love you and that’s why there is a hell,” said Msgr. Pope, pastor of Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Roman Catholic Church in Washington D.C., not far from Capital Hill. “It’s not about an angry God trying to keep people out of heaven, but rather a deeply loving God who is very reverential of our freedom, and He stands at the door and knocks. He doesn’t barge in. And we have to recover a sense that we have a decision to make, whether we really want to be in heaven with God one day – the real heaven, not a made up one. And so that is why I wrote the book. I wanted to recast the teaching to get rid of this notion that somehow, we are saying there is a mean angry God who just doesn’t like people and wants to keep them out.”

He said he is not so worried “about people who know how to come to confession, who are struggling and have habitual sins of some sort. This is very common in the human family, but they know it’s wrong and they go to God and they say ‘I’m sorry, I need help.’ And that is beautiful in its own way, you know, and God wants to help and will free them,” Msgr. Pope said.

“But the ones I’m worried about,” he continued, “are the defiant, who shake their fist against the Church and the teachings of Scripture and say, ‘Look, I will not be told what to do. I am going to celebrate my lifestyle, celebrate my abortion, celebrate a lifestyle that God calls an abomination,’ whatever, or celebrate greed or violence. ‘And I don’t think there is anything wrong. I don’t need forgiveness.’”

Msgr. Pope said a lack of urgency about salvation afflicts not only lay people but is among the clergy and bishops too. “We are all distracted by minor worldly things and souls are being lost. And it’s like, ‘You need everybody to feel nice and feel included.’ But what if they are going to hell?” Msgr. Pope said.

A second reason to emphasize what is at stake in the spiritual battle for heaven and against hell, he said, is that without the battle for heaven, “there is also no joy. If you don’t know the bad news, the good news is no news.”

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