



# Boston Catholic Journal

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## *“Salus Animarum”* the Salvation of Souls



**Whatever became of this most Fundamental Imperative ...  
indeed, the very *reason for the establishment and existence of*  
the Church?**

**It is unlikely** that the vast, indeed, the overwhelming majority of today’s Catholics have not so much as heard of this phrase as old as the Church itself; certainly not in Latin, but with equal

certainty, not in English — and with greater certainty still, not from the pulpit. The very concept of “**the salvation of the soul**” appears to be *non grata* in homiletics for quite nearly 50 years (corresponding, unsurprisingly, to the implementation of Vatican II) — despite the fact that the imperative itself is clearly and unambiguously codified as the *supremus lex* (the supreme law) in Canon Law (1752):

“*Salus animarum supemus lex esto*” — the salvation of souls ... must be the supreme law in the Church.”

It is nothing less than *the sole reason* for the *Incarnation* ... the *Suffering, Crucifixion, Death,* and *Resurrection* ... of Christ: *the salvation of souls!*

Christ as Savior, Christ as Redeemer, cannot be understood apart from this most fundamental and utterly simple concept: *He came to save souls* — not to heal bodies (although He did), not to rectify injustices, not to rehabilitate politics, not to instruct us on economics, and certainly not save the environment.

He came with only two purposes that are really one:

- **To do the will of the Father**
- And the will of the Father is this: **to save souls for all eternity in Heaven** (and in so doing, to deliver them from Hell).

It is really that simple; in fact, so simple that it eludes us in our pretensions to sophistication, and our preferences for sophistry.

For 2000 years the mission of the Church (and its *raison d’etre*, the very reason for its being) could be summed up in two words instantiating that same beautiful simplicity: “*Salus animarum* — **the Salvation of souls**”. Through Christ in the Sacraments this is its *sole* mission.

## No other Mandate

The Church has no other mandate from Christ. Even healing the sick, raising the dead, delivering men from demonic possession, and all that He taught in the *Sermon on the Mount* were means only to the principle end: *the salvation of the soul*. Christ Himself emphatically asks:

“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and *lose his own soul?*” (St. Matthew 16.26).

The purpose of *all* that He said and did was always eschatological, that is to say, pertaining to *the Four Last Things*:

- **Death**
- **Judgment**
- **Heaven**
- **Hell**

Everything else pales in significance. Two come once only, and two are everlasting.

To pretend that we really do not fully understand what Christ was talking about, and which He proclaimed in the clearest terms, is just that: *pretension*. We know very well what Christ said and did — but to our own devious and often deviant ends, we assume an air of erudite perplexity concerning them:

“Despite what He *appears* to say; indeed actually says, *this* is what He *really* means ...”

And our *own* interpretation only accords with what we *wish* He had said, for this would provide us with excuses for our sins or alternatives for His extremely unsettling pronouncements. We go from the reality of: “*If only He had said ...*” to the fiction: “*This is what He really means ...*”

*because I am much more comfortable with this interpretation — which, rather coincidentally, allows me to continue in sin.*” In short, it is nothing more than wishful thinking. because they cannot be both true and

However contradictory to what Jesus and His Apostles really said and taught, we choose to believe another narrative, however factitious; a simulacrum that borrows the *vocabulary* of the real but with connotations utterly incongruous with it. It is disingenuous, a sham. There is a pathos of similitude but the depiction is counterfeit. We have not entered the mythical: we have fabricated it. Shamelessly. It pleases us ... and this is the first clue that it is deceptive. We have both an aversion and an affinity for the truth. It is the patrimony of our broken heritage from the beginning. We ineluctably desire the true, but when it *indicts* us we demur from it; unable to accommodate both we resort to dissimulation, to a semblance of the real that is, despite our collusion with pretensions, a defection from it. Hence our penchant for comfortable and spurious “interpretations”.

For all our carefully fabricated allusions to what Christ *really said and meant*, we know the truth — because He *is* the Truth Who does not deceive nor can be deceived. We are *not* pleased with all He said, especially concerning things that frighten us because they *describe* us ... and convict us — and we know it!

Despite this, we insist that so many vitally important things that Jesus *clearly uttered* are nevertheless *not* true — *because* they are not “*inclusive*” and do not accord with our delicate post-modern sensitivities that any *real* deity would surely ascribe to. That some, perhaps many, are left in “outer darkness”, excluded from Heaven because of their depravity and perversion, their penchant for sin and their obstinate predilection for evil, is *unacceptable* to our presently enlightened humanity. The list of our objections would be too long to enumerate and ultimately too tedious. Let us be satisfied with a few:

## The Short List:

- Not everyone goes to Heaven (St. Matthew 7:14)
- People — indeed, many people — go to Hell (St. Matthew 7:14)
- Hell is a real place of punishment, torment, and eternal suffering beyond our comprehension. It is the abode of the devil and demons. It is eternal and eternally devoid of any hope. (St. Matthew 5:29-10; Luke 16:19-31, 13:42; 25:41; St. Mark 9:42-44 etc.)
- No one “goes to the Father” — enters Heaven — except through Christ (St. John 14:6)
- If you deny Him before men on earth, He will deny you before His Father in Heaven (Matthew 10:33)
- Not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord!” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven (St. Matthew 7:21)
- Not any and every religion will bring you to Heaven (St. John 6:26-70)
- Being a “nice person” does not suffice to bring you to Heaven or exempt you from Hell (St. Matthew 5:20; St. Mark 16:15-16)

Such pernicious nonsense has no place in our mythologized concept of God. We *will* have Heaven ... “*dammit*” ... but on *our* terms — *despite* what Jesus Christ says ... much to our consternation, and quite likely to our damnation. We prefer *other* interpretations; more comfortable and convenient exegeses ... and sadly they abound.

For my part, fool that I am, I will take Christ at His word. In fact, I stake my life on it.

Editor

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