



Introduction: When the Veil Is Briefly Torn

A person in deep coma recounts being drawn through a tunnel toward a brilliant light. Another claims to have seen their body from outside, as if floating. Someone else says they heard a voice telling them, “It’s not your time yet”... There are countless accounts across cultures and centuries of what we now call **Near-Death Experiences (NDEs)**. And thanks to advances in medicine, allowing more people to “return” from the threshold of death, these testimonies are becoming increasingly frequent.

But what does the Catholic faith say about such experiences? Are they authentic revelations, mere neurological hallucinations, or something more? How should we discern them? Can they have a purpose in God’s salvific plan? And above all, what do they teach us about **eternal life**, the **particular judgment**, **purgatory**, **heaven**, and **hell**?

This article aims to offer a **deep, accessible, and fully traditional Catholic reflection** on the phenomenon of NDEs—not to satisfy morbid curiosity, but to **awaken in us a consciousness of the eternal, an urgency for conversion, and a hope for glory**.

1. A Brief History of the Phenomenon: Not as Modern as It Seems

Although the term “Near-Death Experience” is recent (coined in 1975 by Dr. Raymond Moody), accounts of people who were “on the brink” of death and claim to have experienced something transcendent are **as old as humanity itself**.

Already in the Middle Ages, numerous mystics and saints spoke of visions of judgment, heaven, or hell in moments of extreme illness or danger. The monk **Benedict of Wenlock Abbey**, in the 8th century, wrote of being taken before God to render an account and then sent back. In Catholic tradition, these experiences have always been interpreted **within the framework of revealed doctrine**, not as definitive proof, but as possible graces for conversion and edification.



2. What Exactly Are NDEs? What Do the Testimonies Say?

NDEs often share common elements:

- A sensation of separating from the body (seeing oneself from above).
- Passage through a tunnel toward an intense light.
- Encounters with luminous beings or deceased loved ones.
- A review of one's life.
- A sense of peace—or in some cases, anguish and darkness.
- Messages of “return,” as “it is not yet time.”

Scientifically, some attribute these experiences to neurological mechanisms (endorphin release, cerebral hypoxia, temporal lobe activity, etc.). But even the most skeptical admit that many NDEs **do not fit easily** into purely physiological explanations, especially those that include **verifiable information about events that occurred while the person was clinically dead**.

3. What Does the Church Teach About What Happens After Death?

The Catholic faith clearly teaches that:

- **Death is the end of earthly life and the beginning of one's personal eternity.**
- Immediately after death, the soul undergoes the **particular judgment**, receiving its eternal fate: **heaven, purgatory, or hell**.
- There is no reincarnation or second chances after death (cf. *Hebrews 9:27*: “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment”).

Therefore, any mystical experience at the threshold of death must be interpreted **in the light of revealed doctrine**, avoiding errors such as universalism (“everyone is saved”), vague spiritualism, or the idea of wandering between two worlds without a final destiny.



4. Are NDEs Compatible with the Catholic Faith? A Necessary Discernment

The Church has not issued an official pronouncement on NDEs themselves, but **offers clear criteria for discerning them**:

□ *They Can Be Fruits of Grace:*

God may allow an extraordinary experience **to spark conversion, strengthen faith, or warn others**. Many people who have had NDEs undergo a radical change in life, converting and abandoning sin.

| “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:16).

△ *They Can Be Deceptions of the Enemy:*

The devil can disguise himself as “an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14) to **present a false image of the afterlife**, suggesting there is no judgment, that everyone is saved, thus inducing people into sin or false hope.

□ *They Are Not Public Revelations:*

As striking as they may be, NDEs **add nothing to the deposit of faith**. As the Catechism teaches (nn. 66–67), **public Revelation ended with the Apostles**. Private experiences do not oblige belief and must be judged with prudence and in conformity with Catholic doctrine.

5. Negative NDEs: An Urgent Call to Conversion

Many testimonies do not describe peace and light but **darkness, screams, suffering, and terror**. People far from God or living in sin report feeling the proximity of hell. Some claim to have pleaded for mercy and were “sent back” to life with the purpose of changing.

These cases, although less publicized, are **immensely important**, for they **confirm the**



reality of eternal punishment, as taught by Christ:

“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41).

It is no coincidence that many saints spoke about hell with great clarity: **Saint Teresa of Ávila, the Holy Curé of Ars, Saint Alphonsus Liguori**. Negative NDEs can be a **providential warning for our drowsy generation**.

6. Theology of Death and Judgment: What Truly Matters

From traditional theology, **death is a decisive moment in the spiritual battle**. Saint Alphonsus said the devil reserves his greatest efforts for the moment of our death. That’s why the Church has always prayed for a “happy death” (devotion to Saint Joseph as patron of a good death is ancient and beautiful).

At the moment of death:

- The soul **separates from the body**.
- It appears **before God**.
- It is judged based on its deeds, faith, and the state of the soul.
- It receives its eternal destiny, without any possibility of change.

This truth should lead us to **live watchfully**, as the Lord says:

“Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt 25:13).



7. Practical Applications for the Christian Soul

So what should we do in the face of this topic? How can we spiritually benefit from the lessons of NDEs?

1. Live Each Day as If It Were the Last

Not out of irrational fear, but with **hope and responsibility**. Every moment counts. Every confession, every Mass, every act of charity can be decisive for eternity.

2. Recover the Meaning of Christian Death

Death is not a sad end but a **personal Passover**. Therefore, the Church calls the faithful to **actively prepare to die in a state of grace**, through the sacraments, forgiveness, and living faith.

3. Pray for the Dying and for Souls in Purgatory

Offer indulgences, Rosaries, and Masses, especially for those who die without spiritual assistance. Many need our prayer in that final battle!

4. Have Devotion to the Holy Rosary and the Blessed Virgin Mary

She is the “*advocate of the dying*” and **guides the passage to eternity**. The Rosary is a sure weapon in the final hour.

5. Keep the Sacraments in Order

Frequent confession, fervent communion, anointing of the sick when death approaches. Don't postpone salvation.

8. Conclusion: God Wants to Save Us, But Not Without Us

Near-death experiences, seen through eyes of faith, are **a wake-up call from heaven**. It's not enough to be moved by a compelling testimony. What matters is **conversion, living in**



grace, being prepared. The Lord loves us and desires our salvation, but **respects our freedom.**

If you've read this far, it's not by chance. Perhaps God is inviting you today to examine your life, your faith, your readiness for eternity.

Don't wait for an NDE to react. Take this moment as **a grace of conversion**, because heaven is real... and hell is too.

| *"Now is the favorable time; now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).*

To Continue Growing:

- Pray the *Act of Contrition* daily.
 - Visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament at least once a week.
 - Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently.
 - Read the lives of saints who spoke of judgment and heaven (such as Saint Faustina, Saint John Bosco, Saint Teresa).
 - Offer your life to Jesus for the conversion of sinners and for the dying.
-

And you—are **you** ready to cross the threshold when your hour comes?