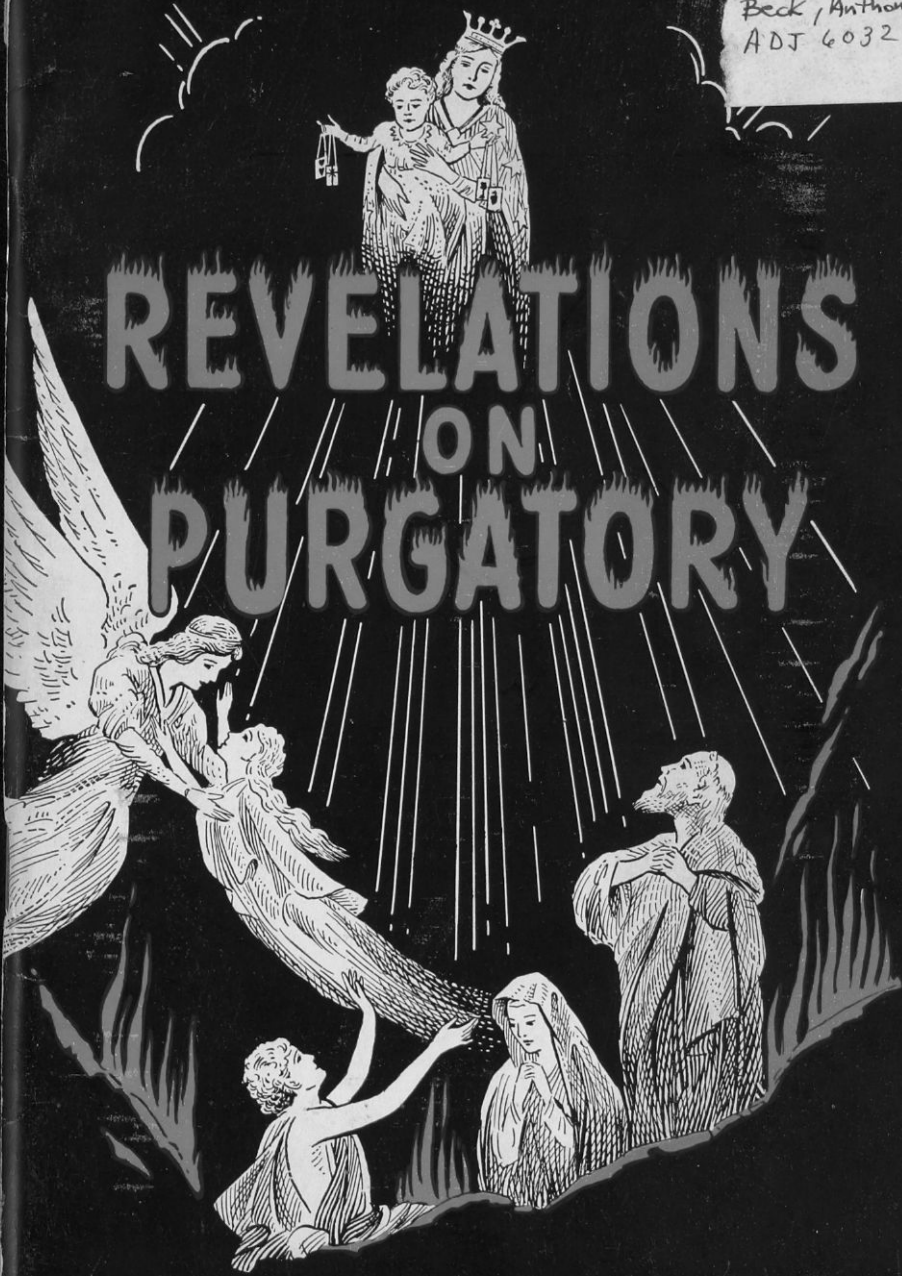
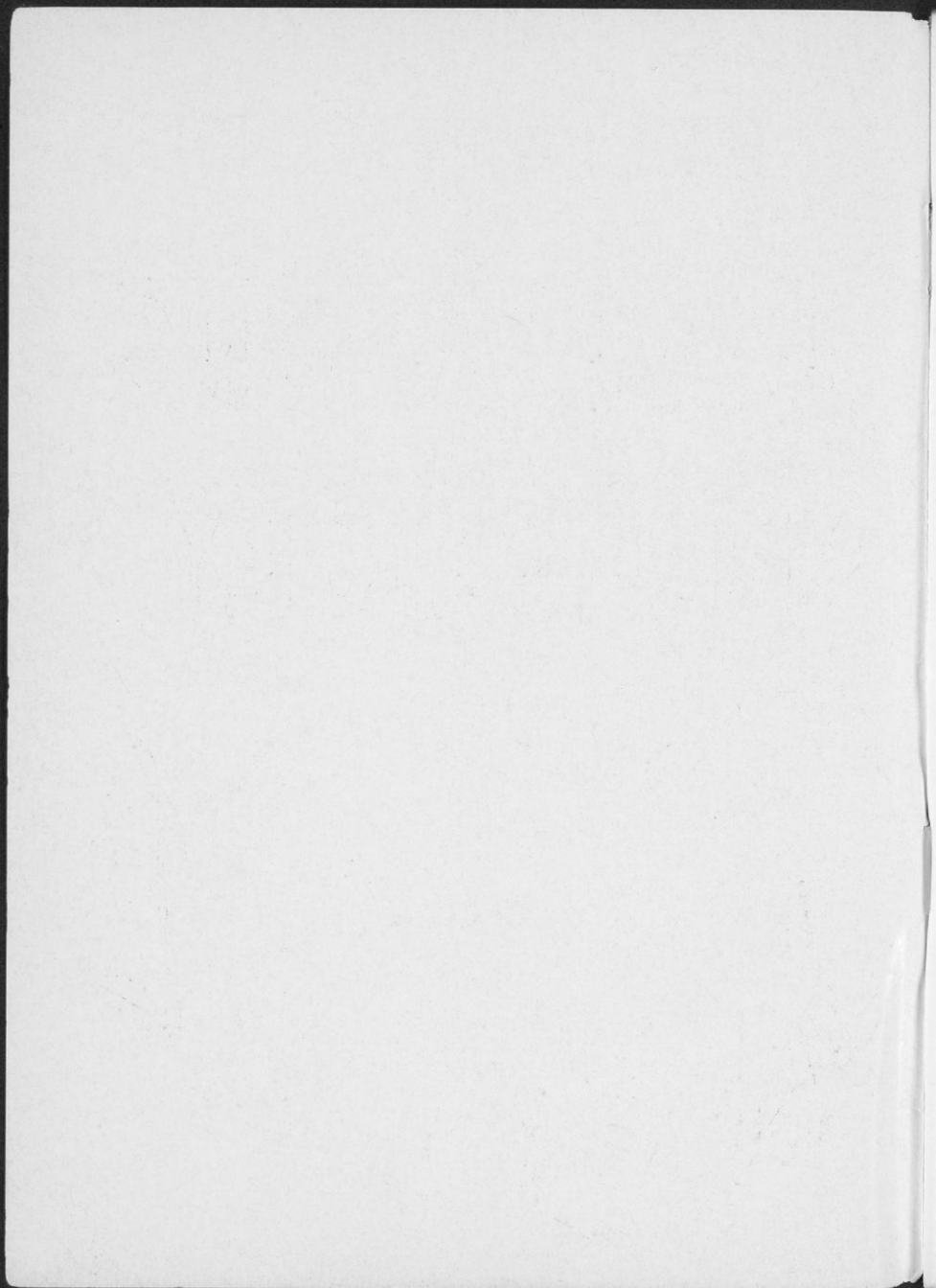


Beck, Anthony J.  
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# REVELATIONS ON PURGATORY





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on  
PURGATORY



By

*Anthony J. Beck, M. A.*



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“MY mother,” said Blessed Catherine Emmerich after a vision, “led me to the sojourn of many souls and I came to a hill out of which appeared a spirit, red as copper and dragging a chain. He had been here a long time and was without any aid, as no one remembered him and prayed for him . . . He said that the offering of Masses would be especially helpful and that nothing else would so hasten his release. I always beheld him being barked at and torn by dogs because he had tortured people. Frequently he lay in different positions, sometimes resembling a block, while boiling blood was poured through him and ran through his veins. He said that the hope of deliverance was most refreshing to him. When he had finished speaking, he sank back into the hill and the place where he had stood was covered with flaming grass. This was the third time he appeared to me.”

“In comparison to the pains of Purgatory,” wrote St. Magdalen of Pazzi, “all the torments of the martyrs are like a pleasant garden.”

St. Teresa of Avila says: “The pains of the spirit differ greatly from those of the body. Hence I conclude that the souls in Purgatory suffer much more than we can understand according to the measure of corporal pains” (Ribera, vita 4, 3).

But many Christians outside the Catholic Church hold that there is no Purgatory, and many Catholics act as if its torments were of little moment and short duration.

By the term, Purgatory, we understand the place where souls which passed out of this world in friendship with God but are not pure enough for heaven, pay the last debts of their transgressions and shortcomings.

These souls must do penance either for venial sins or tem-



poral punishments due to sin. Everything impure must be purged away so that the image of God may be clearly reflected in the soul. This occurs through fire.

True, some consider this fire only in a figurative sense, an image of the spiritual agony through which this cleansing is effected. Much of what we learn of Purgatory from the descriptions of holy persons is to be understood in a symbolical sense. However, as to the nature of Purgatory, most theologians hold that it is a physical fire which afflicts the departed souls.

The Church's doctrine on Purgatory confirms both to sound reason and to the noblest feelings of the human heart. What else could be done with the souls which are not sufficiently pure for heaven?

They cannot be sent to Hell, for they died at peace with God. There must be an intermediate place where these souls are fully prepared for Heaven. In view of our human frailties and of the severity of God's justice, how anxious we would be over our fate if there were no hope of satisfaction after death! What would console us at the death of our parents and friends if we should have to fear that their souls were not without stain?

If there were no Purgatory, how could we explain the reference in St. Peter's First Epistle (3, 19) to "those spirits that were in prison"? If they had been in Hell, they could not have been liberated. In St. Matthew's Gospel (5, 26) we read: "Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."

According to the passages in the second book of the Maccabees which even the school children know by heart, some of the departed are stained with sin but may be freed from it through prayer, alms and sacrifice. In Matthew (12, 32) our Divine Savior makes this threat:

"And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man,

it shall be forgiven him: but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come."

According to these words there must be forgiveness of sin in the hereafter. Not, of course, for mortal sin, for after death there is no possibility of conversion, of gaining the state of grace. Hence, there is question only of venial sins for which insufficient satisfaction was made or for which the suffering soul was not sufficiently sorry. Besides Heaven, where nothing sinful may enter, and in addition to Hell, whose inmates are incapable of receiving forgiveness, there must be another place for this cleansing from venial sin and temporal punishments. This place is Purgatory. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians (1, 3, 13-15):

"Every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.'

Here the apostle contends that there is a class of sinners who can be saved in the other world. He also indicates the means, a cleansing as by fire. This fire cannot be the tribulations of earth, for it burns after this life. It cannot signify the judgment of God, for it burns, causes pain and consumes something. Nor can it be Hell fire, because those in Hell have no hope of salvation. It can only be Purgatory.



## VIEWS OF FATHERS OF CHURCH

The clear teaching of Holy Scripture on Purgatory is confirmed unequivocally by tradition. In Bellarmine's treatise on Purgatory we find numerous striking passages from Greek and Latin authors. Tertullian (*De Anima et De Resurr. Carn.*) speaks of the subterranean prison from which no one will be released until he has paid the last farthing. From the connection it is evident that he refers to Matthew (5, 25) and Luke (12, 58) and applies the text to Purgatory as do other theologians.

St. Gregory of Nyssa says in his speech on the departed (Migne, *Patrologisgralca*, 46, 525): "Separated from the body, the soul understands clearly the difference between good and evil and cannot enjoy the beatific vision unless its stains have been wiped out in Purgatory." St. Augustine declares positively in his work, "The City of God," that many must suffer temporal punishment after death; that they must obtain forgiveness in the hereafter of guilt not remitted here, for otherwise they would have to suffer eternal torments. This thought worried St. Augustine after the death of his dearly beloved mother and he prayed, as we learn from the thirteenth chapter of the ninth book of his *Confessions*:

"Although my mother lived in such wise that we would have to praise Thy mercies in the greatness of her faith and her purity of morals, I would nevertheless not contend that no single word came from her mouth against Thy Commandments after her rebirth through Baptism . . . Therefore, I forget for the moment the good works of my mother, for whom I rejoice and thank Thee, God of my heart, life and fame of my soul, and I entreat Thee for forgiveness of her sins.



Oh, God, hear my prayer in the name of Him who was fastened to the cross for us that He might become the healing of our wounds and Who sits at Thy right hand, where He continually is our mediator. I know that she was merciful, that she forgave all those who had offended her. Remit Thou also the offenses which she committed against Thee since her Baptism. Forgive her, O Lord, I entreat Thee, forgive her . . . When the day of her dissolution approached she pleaded for only one thing, that we would constantly think of her at Thy altars at which she served every day without fail and where she knew the most adorable Sacrifice would be offered."

St. Cyprian (third century) speaks of the custom of celebrating the Sacrifice for the repose of souls as being already practised by the bishops who preceded him. Eusebius, the historian (fourth century), describes how at the funeral of Constantine the Great, the priests and people, with tears and much lamentation, offered up prayers and sacrifice for the repose of his soul.

This is a modest selection of testimony from the Fathers of the Church. We might also refer to the solemn declarations of faith by the Church. In the confession of faith which was made by Michael Palaeologus in 1276 and which Pope Eugene IV on July 6, 1439, imposed on the Greeks, we read:

"When Christians die truly penitent in the love of God but before they have made amends by penance for misdeeds or omissions, their souls will be purified through the punishment of Purgatory. Their penalties can be mitigated through the entreaties of the living, namely the Mass, prayers, alms and other pious works offered for them according to the laws of the Church.'



## CHURCH DECREES

The principal de fide decrees of the Church on the subject—decrees, *i. e.*, declaring that the doctrine set forth has been revealed by God and is therefore binding on the faithful under pain of heresy—are those of the Council of Trent (sess. 25), “that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are assisted by the suffrages of the faithful, but especially by the most acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar,” and the Council of Florence which had previously (A. D. 1439) defined, “If men have died penitent in the love of God, and before they have made satisfaction by fruits worthy of penance for sins of omission and of commission, their souls are purified after death by the pains of Purgatory; and to the relief of these pains avail the suffrages of the faithful, sacrifices of Masses, prayers, alms, and other offices of piety.”



## PLEASING TO GOD

A report on the founding of a convent by St. Teresa of Avila reveals how pleasing to God are prayers for the Poor Souls. The saint had received from a Spanish nobleman, Don Bernardino de Mendoza, a house, a garden and a vineyard for the founding of a convent.

"About two months later," she writes, "the donor suddenly became so seriously ill that he lost his power of speech and could not make a confession. He could merely indicate by gestures how earnestly he desired God's forgiveness. Soon afterward he died, and God indicated to me that the nobleman's spiritual well being had been in doubt, but that, in view of his donation, he had obtained mercy. However, his soul would remain in Purgatory until the first Mass would be offered in the new convent."

"The intense sufferings of this poor soul," continues St. Teresa, "were constantly in my mind. Though I was eager to open a convent in Toledo, I delayed so as to be able to undertake as soon as possible the foundation in Valladolid. But there were delays, and God made known to me in prayer that I should hurry, as that soul suffered greatly."

The saint hastened to Valladolid, summoned artisans and arranged the most necessary things for opening a convent. She still lacked canonical permission, but she was allowed to have Mass offered in the space to be used as a chapel. St. Teresa did not expect in the least that the Lord's promise concerning the soul of the donor should be immediately fulfilled. She thought the promise referred to the first Mass to read when the Holy Eucharist was reserved in the tabernacle.

“But as I was about to receive Holy Communion,” continues the saint, “and the priest approached with the Blessed Sacrament, I saw near it the young nobleman with joyful countenance. With folded hands he thanked me for what I had done to redeem him from Purgatory, and then his soul entered Heaven.”

From this we may conclude how exceedingly merciful is the Lord and how impatiently he longs for the liberation of the dearly beloved souls whose fate He has to a great extent placed in our hands.



## SEVERE VIEW

Convinced as we are of the existence of Purgatory, we know little concerning its various penalties. This much is certain: The sufferings of the Poor Souls are measured by strict justice and correspond to their wrong doings. With our imperfect human faculties we can never fully grasp the magnitude of their agony.

There are, generally speaking, two views of Purgatory. However, they complement each other. The first, or severe view, was held by many saints before Francis de Sales and Catherine of Genoa (died in 1510). This view represents Purgatory, as far as its pains are concerned, as being almost on the same plane as Hell, except that its sufferings are not eternal. Torments, cries of agony, fear and terror reign. Fire which was created to torture souls, punishes them in a mysterious manner like the damned in Hell.

According to St. Bernardine of Siena, our earthly fire is like a painted fire by comparison. The soul experiences an indescribable terror at having become the victim of such physical pain. Moreover, in the first stage of purgation, some souls are held in intense darkness.

To the pain of the senses is added the sorrow of separation from God. The Poor Soul has had a glimpse of God's beauty and is now freed from everything which on earth dulled its desire for God. We all know that intense feeling known as homesickness. Yet all the longing of a child for its parents and home on earth is trifling compared to the burning desire of the Poor Souls for God and Heaven. The unconquerable urge for happiness, which Divine Providence has placed in every hu-

man heart and which can only be satisfied by vision of the Creator, awakes in all its intensity when the burden and distractions of earth are removed, and it drives the soul towards God with terrific force. If not detained in Purgatory, it would speed toward Heaven faster than the bullet seeks its goal. This burning longing is experienced all the more by the Poor Souls because they have the grace of God and know that they are to be with Him forever. Invisible powers, the justice of God and their own understanding of their guilt, hold them back. Hence they burn with the pain of love and heavenly homesickness. If souls could die, they would perish from agonized longing for their Creator. Cajetan taught that some souls suffered more intensely in Purgatory than others do in Hell.

If we had no other proofs, these considerations would suffice to measure the intensity of these sufferings and to fill our hearts with deepest sympathy for the Poor Souls among whom perhaps are father, mother, brothers, sisters, etc. Just consider the tortures which people have to undergo in this life as a result of illness! If we read the Lives of the Saints we learn of the terrible torments suffered by confessors of the faith. From these we may get an idea of the pains of the Poor Souls.

Cardinal Bellarmine, in his treatise on Purgatory, considers the revelations of the saints in the light of theology. He cites these words of St. Thomas: "In those questions concerning Purgatory which the Church has not decided one must be guided by the thoughts which harmonize with sayings and revelations of the saints."

Some saints seem to have been destined by God to promote devotion for the Poor Souls or to offer up their entire lives for the liberation of these souls. Prominent among these was St. Gregory the Great. In his day the savagery of barbarians caused indescribable misery in Italy. Numerous churches were without priests, and districts in which Christianity had flour-

ished became completely pagan. St. Gregory's problem was gigantic, but he knew where to find help. He made Rome a place of refuge for exiles and the abandoned. To those outside the city he sent physical and spiritual aid through his missionaries. His table was set for all who came to Rome and for the poor of the city. Thus he had the privilege one day to have as his guest his guardian angel and Our Divine Lord. The earth was too small for his charity, which sent prayers and sacrifices of expiation into Purgatory. He also won many intercessors for the deceased. His dialogues are a mainspring of devotion for the Poor Souls for all time. Peter Faber, a famous Jesuit, declared that if Pope Gregory had not emphasized and clarified the Church's teaching so successfully, the devotion for the Poor Souls would have been much less ardent in succeeding centuries.

A touching vision of Purgatory has been preserved for us by St. Boniface in a letter written to the Abbess Walburga by a pious brother in a religious order. The latter said it was as if a veil had been removed from his eyes. Then he beheld "down in the depths of the earth fiery wells, the place of purgation, where hover many souls in deep sorrow. Over the fiery stream is a bridge over which the souls come after judgment. Some cross it without stumbling, but others plunge into the flames which envelop some up to the knees, others to the shoulders, and still others completely. On emerging on the other side, they are more beautiful and purer than when they fell in. Beneath the fiery wells, in the deepest abyss is Hell, filled with indescribable sighs and complaints because God's mercy does not penetrate."

The visions of St. Birgitta (died 1373) and of St. Frances of Rome (died 1440) are more specific and provide additional details. The former saw Purgatory as consisting of three departments. On the first level over Hell is a large dark chamber,

alternately filled with fire and cold air, in which the Poor Souls are tormented by gruesome looking poisonous animals and the sight of evil spirits. An impenetrable darkness constitutes their worst punishment. The saint beheld a soul pierced by fire and wrapped in towering flames.

On the second level the saint saw souls suffering most from the lack of those virtues and good works which they neglected. They must linger until amends are made for this deficiency by their friends or the prayers of the Church. They resemble a patient who, after being freed of fever and pain, only gradually acquires his former strength and beauty.

Finally, according to the saint's vision, the soul enters the third stage where it suffers no pain except an unutterable longing to see God. Here are many souls and frequently for a long time because during their life on earth they had no perfect desire to be with God.

Few persons die and attain eternal happiness immediately without being detained in this place. All these souls benefit more or less by the prayers which the Church and persons on earth offer for them. They long for these prayers more ardently than the hungry person for food, the thirsty one for drink, the sorrowing one for joy and the sick person for rest and recovery (Revelation, book 4, chap. 7).

St. Frances of Rome likewise beheld Purgatory in three levels, one above the other, but, according to her, all Poor Souls are enveloped in a clear, bright fire unlike the dark fire of Hell. Everywhere the saint saw at the left of the tortured souls evil spirits who increased their suffering by contempt and ridicule. However, on the right side of the Poor Souls were angels consoling them (Goerres, *Christian Mysticism*, 111, 474).

Very detailed was the picture presented to St. Magdalen of Pazzi (died 1607). While she was at recreation in a garden with other sisters, she had a vision. For two hours she walked



up and down the large garden, stopping here and there when she was shown some particularly severe penalty, wringing her hands, turning pale and stooping as under a heavy load and showing such signs of terror that her companions shuddered. When she came to the spot where the clergy suffered, she sighed heavily and cried out: "Good God, and you, too?"

According to her vision those who had sinned without full knowledge and had died young suffered less and were consoled by their angels. The hypocrites were punished most severely and amid terrors close to Hell. The impatient and stubborn appeared laden with a crushing burden. At one period of her vision she became terror-stricken and called on Heaven for assistance. Then she came to the place where molten lead was poured into the mouths of liars while the misers, who could never acquire enough goods on earth, were over-burdened with pain and the impure were detained in an insufferable stench. Finally, she was shown those who had not been given much to any one sin but had committed nearly all to some degree. They shared the torments of all in a smaller degree. When the vision had passed the saint begged God to never again let her see such misery as her soul would perish (Goerres, *Christian Mysticism*, 111, 473).

From these examples, which illustrate and emphasize the terrors of Purgatory, we glean that the spirit of this severe view is a holy fear of offending God, a desire for mortification and a constant and wholesome dread of God's judgment. These souls knew very well the great power of the passions over weak human beings. They realized how difficult it is for us to grasp spiritual things, how easily we make reservations and set limits to our sacrifices for the love of God and how easily we are content with past deeds instead of making special exertions to win the prize of heavenly reward.

The severe view of Purgatory was entertained particularly

by those who had practiced unusual penance or were members of strict orders. Scholastic theology, as we can see from Bellarmine, has systematically developed this view. It is "a beginning of all wisdom and a way to happiness," as Divine Providence warned Blessed Henry Suso at a time when, with increasing intimacy with God, he came to value less the pains of Purgatory. He was told to be wise and not to treat these sufferings lightly.

This view is based on many truths. Having been held by many great saints or servants of God, it is most worthy of consideration. However, it is not complete and does not exhaust the Church's teaching on the place of purgation. True adoration of God also does justice to His love of man. This is all the more necessary for poor, sinful, and frail man who would otherwise fall into despair. Only when we consider also the second or milder view of Purgatory and compare it with the former to see what both have in common, do we get the right picture of Purgatory, a picture full of lessons for our own welfare and for aid to the Poor Souls.



## THE MILD VIEW

The milder view of Purgatory includes the outlines of the stricter view but emphasizes other considerations. The chief points are found in the writings of Francis de Sales on the subject. Bishop Camus writes in his book, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*:"

"The thought of Purgatory is more suited to inspire consolation than fear. Most persons greatly fear Purgatory because they are influenced more by love of self than by zeal for the glory of God . . . Though the pains of the cleansing fire are so intense that the sufferings of this life cannot be compared to them, the interior satisfactions of Purgatory are so marvelous as to exceed all joys and happiness of earth."

Bishop Camus mentions twelve of these joys and highly recommends the treatise of St. Catherine of Genoa on Purgatory. Let us sketch this work and add illustrations from the experience of other holy souls.

As soon as a soul has left this earth at peace with God and has been judged, it feels confirmed in this love, though it may have to do penance for venial sins or temporal punishments. It can neither sin nor earn merit and is destined through God's unchangeable judgment to enter some day into the empire of the blessed and to see and enjoy God, its final end and the source of its happiness.

For a fleeting moment the soul sees the cause of Purgatory in itself, namely in its sins and offenses. This passing glimpse enables the soul to form an act of the will to despise anew all venial sins for which it did not have sufficient contrition in life either because of inadequate knowledge or the misfortune

of sudden death. This act is not meritorious, but it shows that literally no sin is forgiven unless man is sorry for it.

The Poor Soul realizes the evil consequences of its sins and understands clearly that these effects hinder it from seeing God until they have been expiated and removed by the fire of Purgatory. It feels a penetrating desire to suffer these penalties and voluntarily plunges into the cleansing fire. Indeed, if there were no place of purgation, a veritable Hell would develop in the soul because it would see that it could not reach God, its highest goal.

If such a soul had the choice between immediately entering Heaven or going to Purgatory and doing penance, it would rather plunge into the hottest fire, yea even into a thousand Hells, than appear with the slightest stain before the Divine Majesty. Although its sufferings in Purgatory are almost as terrible as those of Hell, the soul sees in them a manifestation of exceeding mercy because thereby it is enabled to overcome an obstacle to eternal happiness. The importance of Purgatory surpasses human understanding and human eloquence.

Thus St. Catherine.

According to St. Francis de Sales, the soul on entering Purgatory is consoled "by the amiable and luminous countenance of Jesus Christ." It is "continually united with God and so resigned to His will and so changed that it wishes to remain there as long as He desires." It suffers the humiliation of being prevented for a longer or shorter period from seeing God; yet it praises the divine justice. It can not sin any more or be impatient in the least nor become guilty of the smallest imperfection. Though still bearing minor stains, such a soul is intensely loved by God and vested with the greatest beauty.

This is evident from a revelation of St. Gertrude. In her convent two pious sisters had died—sisters who had preserved their innocence and had served God with complete devotion.

When St. Gertrude prayed for the elder of the nuns, she beheld her soul near the divine throne and surrounded by light. Nevertheless, the soul evaded the glance of the Divine Savior and did not dare to look at His Majesty. St. Gertrude asked in astonishment:

"Most merciful God! Why dost Thou not receive this soul into the arms of Thine infinite charity? What are the strange gestures of diffidence which I behold in her?" Then Our Lord, lovingly stretched out His right arm, as if He would draw the soul nearer to Himself; but she, with profound humility and great modesty, retired from Him. The saint, lost in still great wonder, asked why she fled from the embraces of a Spouse so worthy to be loved; and the religious answered her, "Because I am not yet perfectly cleansed from the stains which my sins have left behind them; and even if He were to grant me in this state a free entrance into Heaven, I would not accept it; for all resplendent as I look to your eyes, I know that I am not yet a fit spouse for my Lord."

A month later the other sister died after a long illness and appeared to St. Gertrude while at prayer. The deceased nun was in a brilliantly illuminated place. She was clad in purple and at her side appeared Jesus giving her mysterious consolation from His five sacred wounds. However, the deceased nun acted as if she were worried about something and Jesus said to St. Gertrude: "She can not be entirely satisfied because I am revealing to her only the love of My humanity, because in her last moments on earth, she showed great love for My sufferings. When expiation has been made for all the negligences of her earthly life, I will grant her the delight of beholding My divinity."

St. Gertrude suggested that the sister's short-comings might have been wiped out by her holy longing near death. But Jesus replied that this grace did not extend so far. "But," queried

St. Gertrude further, "could the excess of Thy mercy not have forgiven the rest of her sins, as Thou didst grant her from her childhood an admirable kindness and charity toward others?" Jesus answered: "Her charity will receive an excellent reward, but first even the slightest stains of errors must be expiated and extinguished."

With signs of great affection, the Divine Savior turned to the soul and said: "Moreover, My bride unquestioningly submits to the demands of My justice which denies to her the full vision of My divinity until she is perfectly clean." And the soul replied: "Indeed, gladly!"

Thereupon the Divine Lord seemed to withdraw into Heaven and to leave the soul alone at the same place. She appeared lonely and felt a great longing to follow Him. This was her punishment for a somewhat inordinate pleasure in association with other persons and for occasional indolence resulting from physical frailty.

When St. Gertrude again prayed for this soul at Mass and offered the Sacred Host for her, she saw in spirit almost innumerable persons kneeling beside herself and lifting up a picture of the Holy Eucharist. The deceased nun was greatly consoled and said to St. Gertrude:

"Now I experience the truth of the words of the Holy Gospel that even the slightest good deed will be rewarded and the smallest fault must be expiated before or after death. This common sacrifice now affords me great refreshment because of the joy with which I once received the Holy Eucharist. My ardent charity toward all human beings now gives such power with God to your intercession for me. But beyond all this I expect an eternal reward for it."

"Thus," concludes St. Gertrude, "this soul, supported by the prayers of the Church, seemed to rise higher and higher towards God and finally she understood that as soon as she

arrived at her goal, our Lord Himself would, in His infinite mercy, meet her with a crown in His hand and lead her into the joys of supreme happiness."

"When the just soul has entered Purgatory," says St. Catherine, "it sees only two things, an excess of suffering and of joy. Intense pain arises from the clear knowledge that God loves it with infinite love, that He is the highest good and has destined it to be eternally happy in the company of the blessed. Hence, it loves Him with the purest and most perfect love. At the same time, however, it is aware that it can not see and possess Him, and its sorrow is magnified by its uncertainty as to when the period of exile from God and from paradise will end."

This pain of separation is so extraordinary that no tongue can describe it. Imagine that there were only one loaf of bread in all the world, and people were sated by merely looking at it. What would be the feelings of a healthy, hungry man who could neither see nor eat the bread and could neither become ill nor die? His hunger would increase and cause him intolerable pain.

This comparison, writes Father William F. Faber in his book, *Everything for Jesus*, is merely an image of the real suffering of the Poor Soul. It feels itself drawn toward God by a loving power that surpasses understanding and this power increases in proportion to the time it is deprived of the object of its intense longing. Its pain likewise would grow if it were not assuaged by the certainty that it was approaching eternal happiness. The prophet says: "And the Lord was pleased to bruise Him in infirmity: if He shall lay down His life for sin, He shall see a long-lived seed, and the will of the Lord shall be prosperous in His hand." (Isaias 53, 10).

The pain of sense of the Poor Soul is compared by St. Catherine to the purifying of gold in the furnace. She writes: "The

more it melts the purer it becomes, and it is melted until all base elements are eliminated. This is the effect of fire on earthly things. Similarly the divine fire works on the soul until it rests entirely pure in God."

A striking illustration is found in the revelations of St. Gertrude. She had received news that a very wordly man had died. Moved by the sorrow of his relatives, she prayed ardently for a long time for his soul. The latter appeared to her in a disfigured form, black as coal and with an expression of intense pain. One could not see the tormentor, but it was evident that his old sins, for which he had not done penance, were piercing and tearing those parts of his body which had been the instruments of his misdeeds. St. Gertrude prayed more earnestly and implored Jesus to be merciful to the offending soul. The Divine Savior showed Himself willing but asked whether He should forgive all sins and release the Poor Soul from all pain. St. Gertrude feared that this might not be in accord with His justice. Jesus replied:

"It would not be against justice if you interceded confidently. While he was dying I foresaw your prayer and, therefore, filled him with holy desires so that he might enjoy the fruits of your charity."

"Then," said St. Gertrude, "I entreat Thee, O God, the source and cause of our salvation, to complete this work of mercy in the manner pleasing to Thee, for Thy grace has given me complete confidence."

Scarcely had she uttered these words when the soul of the departed appeared in human form, cleansed of the hideous black color, but with flesh which, though white, still was stained. The soul manifested great joy and appreciation for its deliverance from its terrible torments. St. Gertrude realized that this soul still needed sympathy so that its soiled flesh might become snow white and worthy of seeing God.



"It is remarkable," continues the saint, "that to attain this blessing this soul had to be cleansed from this rust through blows with iron clubs. As this soul had continued a long time in habitual sin, it required great effort to attain whiteness. It was as if a person has been exposed incessantly for a whole year to the rays of the sun."

St. Gertrude says she marveled "how a soul could be so joyful in the midst of so much pain and discomfort." She was informed that a soul which, after committing many grievous sins, passes away in the grace of God, can not attain relief through the ordinary intercessions of the Church. Only when it has been gradually cleansed through the mercy of God, will the ordinary prayers of the faithful be effective. Only then works of penance, offered for it with the right intention, will ease its burden, particularly if they are inspired by ardent charity.

St. Gertrude adds that when the soul referred to had received this blessing, it raised its hands to God and entreated Him, by the love which induced Him to suffer death on the cross, to assist in their trials all those who prayed for the Poor Soul. And Jesus, says St. Gertrude, indicated that He granted this request.

Another inspiring example is found in a book written by Blessed Mechtild of Helfeda. A generous benefactor of her convent, Count Burkhard, had died in his prime, and Mechtild prayed for him. On the second day she saw his soul lying at the feet of Jesus, weeping bitterly because toward the end of life it had made acts of contrition more from fear of punishment than love of God and never in life had shed tears of divine charity.

Moved by the poverty of this soul, Mechtild besought the Lord to grant it the fruits of His own innocent tears in expiation. Jesus complied and the soul was greatly consoled.

During Mass on the thirtieth day Mechtild saw this same soul at the altar and heard it sing: "I know, O Lord, that when Thou doomed me to death it was for my salvation and consolation." Mechtild asked: "Are you free of pain?" The soul replied: "I suffer this, that I cannot see my God and yet long for this favor so ardently that the longings of all men on earth for Him are as nothing in comparison.

"How is that?" asked Blessed Mechtild. "Many saints have desired God with an indescribable longing." The Poor Soul replied: "As long as man carries the burden of his body his physical needs and intercourse with his fellowmen turn his soul from God and prevent it from having the ardent love for God that inflames the soul freed from the flesh and all its hindrances."

In the third month Mechtild again saw this soul with its guardian angel at its right while at its left was one of the choir of holy spirits into whose ranks it had just been received.

Now a word as to the second feeling experienced by the soul on entering Purgatory. St. Catherine calls it an excess of joy. We human beings can scarcely imagine how one can be glad amid severe suffering. And yet the lives of the saints teach us that joy and sorrow may dwell in the same heart. Jesus and Mary always suffered greatly, but they never were unhappy. The souls in Purgatory love with the purest of motives and realize that their sufferings result from His mercy. Hence, they gladly accept them and rejoice in spite of them. St. Catherine says:

"If a Poor Soul were admitted to the beatific vision before it was completely cleansed, it would suffer ten times more than in Purgatory, for it would be unable to bear this excess of benevolence."

St. Catherine believes that only the saints in heaven are more content than the Poor Souls in spite of their fiery torments.

In so far as their will is concerned, they are so well satisfied with God's sacred decrees that their pains scarcely deserve the name. But this resignation in their utter helplessness does not diminish their feeling in the least. On the contrary, their love, which is the source of their patience, augments their sufferings, which increase with the perfection of their desire for God.

To sum up these two points: In view of its sufferings Purgatory appears as a sort of Hell. From the viewpoint of the Poor Souls' certainty of salvation, their imperturbable peace amid bitter pain and their intense love of God, it is like Heaven. Nevertheless, it is terrible, for it delays human perfection which consists in seeing and loving God and praising Him for all eternity. And yet in comparison to earth and its dangers and trials, it is more to be desired than feared, for its flames are flames of love, and longing. We can sum it all up in these simple words of Blessed Catherine Emmerich:

"I was in Purgatory tonight. It was as if I were being led into an abyss, where I saw a large hall. It is touching to see the Poor Souls so quiet and sad. Yet their faces reveal that they have joy in their hearts, because of their recollection of God's mercy. On a glorious throne I saw the Blessed Virgin, more beautiful than I had ever beheld her."

Blessed Catherine then adds this request to the clergyman to whom she told of her vision: "I entreat you when in the confessional to instruct people to pray for the Poor Souls in Purgatory, for they certainly will pray much for us out of gratitude. Prayer for these souls is very pleasing to God because it enables them to see Him sooner."

Here we might cite further revelations of St. Gertrude concerning the two nuns previously mentioned by her. They were seriously ill at the same time. One seemed to be stronger and less in need of care but died first. She had done penance for her sins by her patience and resignation in God's will. The only thing

for which she had to make amends was an occasional lack of zeal for Confession. As her conscience had not upraided her for any sin, she had neglected to obtain forgiveness for her daily imperfections and pretended to be asleep when the chaplain came by so he would not speak to her. Because of her patience in her illness, Jesus wished to cleanse her of these stains before her death and inspired her with a longing for a confessor but at the same time deprived her of speech and gave her a holy fear of God's judgment because of her negligence. By means of this contrite fear He completed her purification at the moment of her death.

When the other sister had died a month later she appeared to St. Gertrude. She was beautifully attired in the splendor of her innocence, her purity of morals and her zeal in observing the rules of the order. Nevertheless, she seemed to lack something. The reason was that she had delighted too much in little presents and visits of friends which were not necessary while her fellow religious had been overlooked. St. Gertrude saw her standing before the gate of the glory of God, who was amiable toward her beyond human undertsanding; but she seemed to faint because she could not approach Him, and her dress seemed to catch on nails. This punishment was the result of her inordinate delight in human consolation. For a time the Poor Soul appeared unable to move. Even when she was freed of this hindrance to her happiness, God still refused to crown her. He explained the delay to St. Gertrude: "She is not being tortured but joyfully expects the completion of her happiness. She is like a young girl who on the evening before a feast longs for the next morning when she will don the splendid attire which she now sees in the hands of her mother."

Blessed Mechtild tells how on All Souls Day the Lord led her into a beautiful garden near Heaven. There was a large number of souls among whom He distributed all prayers and

good works which the Church offered on this day. When the response to the Ninth Lesson was sung, Mechtild asked why this should cause so much joy to these souls. At God's command their hearts were opened and Mechtild saw in each one a large worm which gnawed and punished them without ceasing. Moved to immediate pity, she prayed most fervently for them. Thereupon the worms died and the released souls hurried joyfully to Heaven. The Lord then showed Purgatory to Mechtild, who beheld various punishments. However, when she implored Jesus for the Poor Souls they were immediately free and flew to the garden whence the others had just entered Heaven.

This milder view of Purgatory is evidently inspired by tender love of God, an extraordinary fear of offending Him and an eagerness to champion His cause everywhere. The incident in the revelation of St. Gertrude which represents a soul as avoiding the glance of Jesus and voluntarily remaining in the place of purgation, expresses the character of this milder view of Purgatory. Throughout its painful imprisonment, the soul suffers from love of God, from zeal for His honor, from deep sorrow for having displeased Him; but greater than its longing for bliss is the consolation that now at least it is completely fulfilling the will of God.



## COMPARISON OF TWO VIEWS

When we compare the severe and mild views of Purgatory we find that they agree in this that the duration and intensity of its pains exceed the powers of our imagination. These torments are intense because of the subject, the disembodied soul, and because of God's purpose, the cleansing of the soul from the tiniest trace of guilt.

Marina of Escobar beheld in March, 1617, a Poor Soul in such terrible suffering that she wept with compassion. After she had offered up nine Holy Communions the soul was removed from the flames. However, it was not admitted into Heaven but for a long time "had to wander about in pain outside, now here, now there, after the manner of a sick bird fluttering around."

In the life of Sister Mary Dionysia, who died in 1653, we read that nine years before her death, on the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels, the Lord led her after Holy Communion to the border of Purgatory. He showed her the soul of a mighty lord who had been killed in a duel but who had received the grace of making an act of contrition before his last breath. God commanded Sister Dionysia to pray especially for him. Immediately she beheld the soul and understood that perhaps it would have to do penance till the Last Judgment. In spirit she saw the entire past life of the lord, how he had followed the spirit of the world and of the flesh and cared little for his Poor Soul. His pitiful state aroused her compassion, but she marvelled even more and was most grateful that divine grace had saved this soul in the midst of an act which merited Hell.

Therefore, she devoted the rest of her life, nine years and

three months, to expiation for this Poor Soul and even offered her own life to give it relief from its suffering. As her case is so remarkable, we must also note her explanation. This and her penances for the Poor Soul were recorded by her superior. As she failed physically because of her worry and suffering, her superior remonstrated with her. She replied that she was moved less by the pitiful condition of the Poor Soul of the wordly lord than by the marvelous grace which effected its salvation. She considered it a sign of the infinite love and benevolence of God. The act by which the lord died deserved eternal damnation. There was no thought or prayer on his part to initiate grace. But, thanks to the consoling communion of saints, he participated in the prayers recited for him. He had not lost the faith.

Therefore, she says, he resembled dry wood that easily takes fire. The spark of divine grace touched his soul, and immediately the fire of love flared up in the saving act of contrition. God had employed the natural human instinct of calling on the Creator when in danger, and thus inspired him with the thought of taking refuge to grace. This is more powerful than we can imagine. We can not wink an eye as quickly as it works in the soul. This is an illustration of how wonderfully the human soul is created in the likeness of God. With the rapidity of lightning, grace overpowered Saul and conquered his heart. In his extremity, the man who was stricken in a duel instinctively called on God and gained consciousness for a moment to react to God's grace. In that moment he became truly contrite and thus was able to make an act of perfect contrition before his death. Thus he found salvation where thousands and thousands go to perdition. Sister Dionysia adds:

“And since the devil is a devil, he probably never was more sorely disappointed than when he lost this prey. For he was ignorant of the inner-most sentiment of his victim in those few

seconds of grace which divine benevolence granted him after he was mortally wounded."

Sister Dionysia had the task of giving her life for the release of this Poor Soul. Her corporal and mental sufferings are indescribable. Finally, God showed her the tormented soul over the fiery abyss and assured her that it would be freed from Purgatory some time before the Last Day. Sister Mary now requested another pious nun to pray with her, and in time others were induced to offer Masses and good works for her intention. Finally, Sister Mary offered all her sufferings, prayers, Masses, Communion and indulgences and even her life for the liberation of the Poor Soul. Her sacrifice was accepted. Shortly before her death she announced that it would take many years of prayer and sacrifices to release the poor lord's soul. However, when death finally crowned her heroic sacrifice of nine years of penance and pain, the Poor Soul was freed.





## DURATION OF SUFFERING

So much for the intensity of these torments. As to their duration, Sister Mary remarks that time is measured differently in the other life than on earth. Years of sorrow, poverty and sickness in this world are not to be compared with one hour in Purgatory. We are greatly favored when divine mercy permits us to exert even some influence on the Poor Souls (Faber, p. 316). We are told that there are four reasons why these souls remain much longer in the place of purgation than men generally assume:

First, the inconceivable purity which they require before they may appear before Him who is sanctity itself. Secondly, our innumerable venial sins and faults and our lack of penance for mortal sins. Thirdly, the utter inability of Poor Souls, to help themselves. Fourthly, the laxity of most Christians in praying and offering good works for the Poor Souls, as we forget the dead almost as soon, as we no longer see them, although true love follows them through the flames of Purgatory to the gates of paradise (Faber, p. 313).

The long duration of Purgatory can be understood in two ways—as real duration and as apparent length of time because of the excessive sorrow. Concerning the former we know from the life of Marina of Escobar “that some souls must linger 20 years; other, 40 and 50 and more years. One soul informed her that it had been condemned to such wearisome pain that it was terrible to merely learn of it; but it had been shortened by virtue of her entreaties and those of others.”

In the life of Sister Frances of the Blessed Sacrament we read that many souls had suffered for decades in Purgatory before

they were even permitted to appear to her or to give messages to others. She beheld pious Carmelites who, after thirty and even sixty years in Purgatory, still were far from being released. A pious bishop had been in Purgatory for 59 years because of some negligence in his office, before he appeared to Sister Frances. A priest was detained 40 years because some persons who were ill had died without the sacraments as a result of his carelessness. A nobleman had to suffer 64 years to expiate a fondness for playing for money.

Blessed Catherine Emmerich was noted for her prayers for the Poor Souls. She had dealings with many souls who had been on earth in her youth and whom she and others had considered pious. They had long since been forgotten and had only now obtained permission to appear to her and request her intercession. On one occasion she obtained the release of a priest who had suffered for years because of his inclination for jesting. Among others who asked for her prayers was the soul of a Catholic lord of Brandenburg and the soul of a pious Austrian emperor who had been in Purgatory for decades. She writes:

"They pleaded for promotion to a higher rank so that they might influence their successors on earth."

She notes that an angel folded her hands in prayer. If they sank from fatigue the angel lifted them up, saying: "You must pray longer." She recorded this vision on Sept. 24, 1820:

"My mother led me to the sojourn of many souls and I came to a hill out of which appeared a spirit, red as copper and dragging a chain. He had been here a long time and was without any aid, as no one remembered him and prayed for him. He spoke only a few words, but I learned his entire history. At the time of an English king who was at war with France, this man was commander-in-chief and perpetrated all sorts of cruelties. He had been poorly trained, and his mother seemed to be

responsible for this. However, he had a secret respect for Mother Mary. He destroyed all sacred pictures. On passing a statue of the Blessed Virgin, he was about to wreck it when he was overcome by emotion and desisted. Thereupon he became ill with a high fever and desired to pray but grew unconscious. However, he died penitent and thus escaped damnation. He could receive help but no one thought of him. He said that offering up of Masses would be especially helpful and that nothing else would so hasten his release. I always beheld him barked at and torn by dogs because he had tortured people. Frequently he lay in different positions, sometimes resembling a block, while boiling blood was poured through him and ran through his veins. He said that the hope of deliverance was most refreshing to him. When he had finished speaking, he sank back into the hill, and the place where he had stood was covered with flaming grass. This was the third time he appeared to me."

Three days later Blessed Catherine saw this soul again and was given to understand how, in the infinite mercy and justice of God, nothing good in him was lost. She saw the good and evil traits of forbears effective in their children working, with their consent, to their welfare or misfortune. She saw how the Poor Souls received assistance in a marvelous manner from the treasures of the Church and the love of her children and how all this was "truly a substitution for, and completion of, their defects."

These examples could be greatly increased. But they suffice to excite our compassion for the Poor Souls and to counteract the grave error of imagining that the departed are in Heaven because of their good qualities. It is unjust to them and to us to conclude from a false love that they are no longer in pain, for thus they become the poorest and most abandoned.

It was an altogether different spirit which arranged foundations for weekly or annual Masses for centuries for the de-

ceased, or for various works of charity on the anniversary of departed relatives. The Church has explicitly rejected the contention that an anniversary foundation is not effective after 10 years, as if no soul would have to suffer longer.

It is said erroneously that the duration of Purgatory seems long to some Poor Souls because of intense torments but is really short according to our way of measuring time. Marina of Escobar saw the soul of a benefactor immediately after his death surrounded by flames and very sad because the pain lasted so long. However, after she offered up Holy Communion, this soul was admitted at once into Heaven. Similarly St. Francis Hieronymus cites many examples of souls who appeared to the saint a few hours after their death and believed that they had been in Purgatory for many years.

But there are numerous revelations which attest the long duration of suffering in Purgatory.

The second point in which both views of Purgatory coincide is that those faults which we consider trifling on earth are severely punished. Sister Marina saw a soul suffer three days because, in addition to other failings, it had an inordinate longing for life. Sister Marina offered up nine Holy Communions for its deliverance and already on the third day at Holy Mass the soul was released. Then came angels—some of whom brought the deceased little son of the man to greet him—and took his soul to Heaven.

On another occasion Sister Marina beheld the superior of a religious community who suffered for many days with a fiery ring about his foot because he was guilty of venial sins. She gained an indulgence for him and he was freed. A very pious priest, who had been confessor for many years and for whom many religious had offered prayers, appeared very sad and exhausted.

"Good Jesus," she exclaimed, "is this that same priest? I thought he had been in Heaven a long time."

It was revealed to her that he was suffering for certain defects and that she would pray for him and urge others to do likewise. Some days afterward he attained to the beatific vision. She adds:

"Would to God that we would guard against small defects. For besides exacting penance in Purgatory, they are steps to important things and cool our love for God. None of these defects is so trifling that, if not resisted, it will not weaken our ability to practice virtue."

Then we are told of a monk who had to do penance for five years because he refused to stoop to pick up lost articles. Another monk suffered 15 years because he did not have sufficient desire to behold the Blessed Trinity. A preacher was 40 days in Purgatory for having taken too much delight in his elegant style. The sister of St. Peter Damian suffered 18 days because she had taken too much pleasure in a pleasant song. The sister of St. Catherine of Siena was greatly tormented because she was fond of fine attire. St. Vitalia had to enter Purgatory because she devoted too much care to her body on a Friday, and another saint because he associated closely with a heretic. Sister Frances of the Blessed Sacrament tells of a girl of 14 years being in Purgatory because she was not entirely resigned to the will of God in dying so young. Sister Frances beheld souls who suffered unusually because they had been excessively scrupulous. One of them said to her: "Oh, men think little in life of how severely they must do penance here for faults which they scarcely notice," (Faber, p. 297). Bellarmine says:

"Unless God is very merciful to them, scarcely any just persons escape the great pain of Purgatory, and enter Heaven immediately after death" (Book 4, contr. 2).

In the autobiography of St. Teresa we read: "Though the Lord revealed to me the condition of many souls, I do not know whether any of those I saw escaped Purgatory except two religious priests."

"Everything that man thinks, speaks and does," says Blessed Catherine Emmerich, "has in it something living that continues to work for good or evil. He who has done evil must hasten to wipe out his guilt through contrition and confession.. Otherwise he can prevent only with difficulty or not at all the consequences of evil in its entire development. It always was shown to me that guilt for which no penance has been done has incalculable consequences.

"When near the remains of some departed in cemeteries I had the feeling of light and overflowing blessing. Near others I experienced different degrees of poverty and felt an appeal for help through prayer, fasting and alms. However, at many graves I was filled with fear. If I had to pray at night in a cemetery I experienced at such graves a deeper darkness than that of night . . . Sometimes I saw something like black vapor rising from such graves, something that made me shudder. At times when my desire to help urged me to penetrate into this darkness, I felt my assistance was rejected. The living conviction of God's all holy justice was like an angel that led me from the horrors of such a grave. Over other graves I saw lighter or darker columns of shadow, and on still others, columns of light of varying power.

"On many graves I saw nothing, a circumstance that saddened me most. I became convinced that the lighter or darker rays from the graves were expressions of the Poor Souls concerning the degree of their need, and that those who were unable to give any indication were without help in Purgatory; that no one thought of them, and that they were on the lowest plane of ability to communicate with the body of the Church. If I

lay praying on such graves I often heard a laborious dull voice sighing from the depths: 'Help me to come out,' and I felt the fear of an entirely helpless person. I always prayed more ardently and longer for the forgotten and helpless ones than for others, and gradually I noticed over these silent tombs grey shadows rising that became lighter after continued prayer.

"It was revealed to me that the graves over which I beheld lighter or darker shadows were those of Poor Souls which were not entirely bound and which, through the degree of their cleansing pain or through the help and prayers of living friends, had attained to a more or less consoling relation with the militant Church on earth. They have the ability to give signs and are progressing toward light and bliss. They entreat us because they can not help themselves, and what we do for them they present for us to the Lord Jesus. They always appear to me like poor prisoners who still are able to arouse the compassion of their fellowmen through a cry, an entreaty for an outstretched hand.

"During my life God often granted me the grace of seeing many souls ascend from Purgatory into Heaven with great rejoicing. Oh, how grateful these dear Poor Souls were to me! Oh, if only all men would desire to share this joy with me! What an excess of graces there is on earth, and how they are forgotten and wasted while the Poor Souls sigh so much for them! In their various places with different torments they are filled with anxiety and longing, pining for help and deliverance. No matter how great their need, they nevertheless, praise the Lord and Savior. Everything we do for them causes infinite pleasure."

We have quoted Blessed Catherine Emmerich at length because her revelation is more instructive than a long treatise on Purgatory.

## HELPLESSNESS OF POOR SOULS

Another point on which the mild and strict view of Purgatory coincide is the utter helplessness of the Poor Souls and their boundless gratitude. They depend entirely on our charity. They can do no penance, win no merit, offer no satisfaction, gain no indulgence, receive no sacrament and are beyond the judgment of the vicar of Christ, who disposes of such a vast treasure of graces and means of salvation. Their great helplessness is intensified by the forgetfulness of the living, or, as Father Faber tells us, through the cruel flattery of relatives who insist that those who were near them in life died the death of the just, and have long since attained to the beatific vision. Of how many Masses and prayers, of how much help and consolation, they thereby deprive the Poor Souls of those to whom they owe everything!

Especially rich in this respect was the experience of a contemporary of St. Teresa, Blessed Francesca, who died in Pampluna in 1629. From her father she had inherited a heartfelt pity for the Poor Souls, and this compassion was increased by appearances of her mother and deceased sisters who made pitiful appeals to her. God permitted the Poor Souls to learn of her sympathy for them.

Day and night they came to her—largely because of her expiatory prayers and suffering—to receive consolation. Deceased persons of all walks in life, clergymen and lay persons; those who had been zealous in life and the negligent; those who had died well and others who had not been well prepared—all came to her in her cell, told of their need and begged for assistance. Often they appeared in fiery forms; frequently with black bodies



or only some members black; at times in terrible shapes resembling more wild animals than human beings.

As Francesca often became unconscious from terror, they began to show themselves as floating shadows until she was accustomed to their appearance. They differed according to signs indicating their former vocation or avocation and their respective guilt. Thus a notary came with a pen and writing material; a locksmith with glowing hammer; a drunkard with fiery cup; a vain woman in rags. If Francesca was in the choir, they waited for her at the Holy water font and accompanied her to her cell. If she was with her fellow sisters or at recreation, they came and signalled her. Especially large was the throng on the night of All Souls Day. Some who had been released came to thank her. If she was sleeping they waited at her bed until she awoke. Nevertheless, she could not throw off her fear and always became sad at sundown.

Many Poor Souls gave her instructions for living relatives, but when this caused embarrassment for the convent, her superiors forbade her to pass on such instructions. In consequence, the souls complained very much but praised the sister's obedience. Some souls brought her news of other Poor Souls who were not allowed to come.

Her trials and suffering with them were intense. She did her utmost to assist them, prayed incessantly for them, offered up Holy Communion, had priests read Masses for them, fasted most of the time on bread and water, scourged herself for hours and offered to God all her sufferings, her sleep, her terror, her work, her misery and every activity. Then she would remonstrate with them saying: "O dear, sister, some day I will have to suffer many years in Purgatory, for I have given you everything and kept nothing for myself." But they would console her by promising their gratitude and aid in return.

In the life of Marina of Escobar we read that while she was

praying for a relative the Lord showed her this soul, "in the midst of flames on a burning pyre." Making the sign of the cross, she entered the flames and drew out the Poor Soul. Immediately she saw two other souls which with folded hands, asked her to take pity on them, as they had been two of her servants. She prayed ardently for them and immediately the three souls, singing praises, were led by their angels into Heaven.

"They turned back," she relates, "to thank me for the favor. There was such great rejoicing among the angels when these souls entered Heaven that I asked the reason, and the answer was that they had suffered a long time."

To the foregoing three points common to both views of Purgatory, we may add four that are well founded according to Catholic teaching.

The first consideration is that Purgatory does not signify one and the same place of detention. Many visions of mystics indicate various places where the Poor Souls are purged. Sister Marina was led by angels to a stream where she saw four boys wading in the sand and trying in vain to enter the water. Four other souls were sad and shivered with cold, while farther on four others stood in the water to their breasts and trembled. It was revealed to her by God "that these were souls which must endure their punishment outside of Purgatory."

Other revelations tell of souls which must await their purification in the air, or at their graves, or near altars where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, or in the rooms of those who pray for them, or amid the scenes of their former vanity and frivolity.

Blessed Catherine Emmerich relates: "The Poor Souls are not punished in the same place. I find these places vary greatly. The souls must travel from place to place, over difficult roads which I traverse praying for the souls. In doing so, I remind the saints who accompany me of their sufferings and offer them

up in union with those of Jesus for the Poor Souls. The places of the souls vary according to their condition—gardens, a world of different kinds of disfavor, privation, pain, anxiety, fear, etc. In many places the souls are crowded together and there is great fear. Some are down deeper and appear darker; others are higher and lighter. Those who were together on earth are in the same place only if they require cleansing in the same degree. In some places evil spirits torment, terrify and punish the souls. These are the most horrible places and one would mistake them for Hell if the unutterable and touching patience of the souls did not prove the contrary.

“Words fail to express the joy and consolation felt by the remaining souls when others are released. When this occurred I saw souls ascend from lower to a higher plane. Many have the consolation of being able to move about. They are privileged if they can appear to us, to beg for help and prayers. I also saw places where souls which were declared holy at their departure from earth but had not completed their sanctity, were purified. When Masses were offered for certain souls, I saw dark and forsaken souls crowd toward the altar. They spoke like hungry persons: ‘We have not been fed for a long time’. Abolition of foundations for Masses for Poor Souls is an indescribable cruelty and theft practiced on the poorest of the poor.”

The second of the four additional points is that the purifying of the Poor Souls and their capacity for consolation is in proportion to expiation made in life. All depends on the disposition of heart, and God saves all men who have even a spark of good will. Those who are especially contrite, confess sincerely and pass away with strong confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ are much more able to make atonement and to derive aid from the communion of saints than those who died lukewarm, accepted no admonition because of self love, had no love for penance and were self centered even if they had not committed serious sins.

If to this condition there are added mortal sins for which there was scarcely any contrition or if important responsibilities were neglected because of self love, then this circumstance will determine not only the degree of pain but also the help received from the Church and good Christians. Such persons must make great amends before being eligible for much assistance. The merits of the saints and particularly those of the bitter passion and death of Christ, when offered for them to God, will make them more and more receptive for the grace of deliverance. Blessed Catherine Emmerich says:

“One can not get a clearer picture of their condition than by imagining on earth perfect penal and reform institutions which are entirely adapted to the defects to those being punished and making atonement. If we prescind from the physical separation of men and the fact that one may act in and for the others we have a picture of expiation and redemption.”

Blessed Catherine tells how on one occasion she “was drawn toward Poor Souls without being able to reach them . . . There was a mother with two children. She was down deep and I could not go near her. She spoke in deep and dull tones which were difficult to understand. The children were in another circle and I could approach them. One of them seemed to be on a visit. If I tried to approach the mother, it seemed as if I were too heavy and sank. Though I tried various means and offered prayers and sorrows for her I could not attain to her. I saw a dark vast empire, a world of fog with many circles.

“The condition, privations and pains of the souls necessarily result from their imperfections and wrong doing on earth. One can not approach these souls except through grace, mediation, prayer, good works and merits of the saints, some fruit of some good trait in the life and being of these souls . . . I made many attempts to understand the soul of the mother and to assist her and the children, but when I thought I had raised them, there

always was another hindrance. Finally, I induced St. Mary Marcus to accompany me and through her merits I could approach closer."

In Purgatory, says Blessed Catherine further, "one sees lighter and darker figures with countenances emaciated and sorrowful but patient. It is impossible to describe how touching is their sight. Nothing is so consoling as to see their patience and to note how one rejoices at another's release and deploras the suffering of the others or of a new arrival. I also saw children. The relation of these souls to earth is so tender that the mere desire and longing to assist them effects great relief. What a benefactor is he who continually denies himself for them and constantly seeks deliverance!"



## NUMBER OF POOR SOULS

The third point of similarity concerns the number of the Poor Souls. Father Faber, who contends that probably the suffering Church in Purgatory is far larger than the militant Church, seems to voice the views of most of the saints on this question. Sister Marina marvelled at her privilege in being able to release four Poor Souls after each Holy Communion. However, Our Lord said to her: "Be not astonished but bear in mind that all those whom you may release are in comparison to those remaining in Purgatory like a drop of water to a mighty stream.

The fourth point is the mysterious longing of Jesus for the liberation of the Poor Souls. When the savior was on earth, He wept on several occasions. We know of at least three definite instances: At the grave of Lazarus, at the sight of Jerusalem and in His agony. It must have been touching beyond human understanding to see His sacred countenance bathed in tears. And yet the people whose misfortune moved Him so deeply, were sinful persons, in the last two instances, His tormentors. How great then must be His compassion for the Poor Souls in Purgatory, souls confirmed in His love and grace! And yet He must let them pine away in the greatest torments for weeks, months, years and even decades. How eager He must be to find those who will mediate between His justice and His mercy for these beloved souls! For this purpose He has put at our disposal all His merits of expiation. We may apply His precious blood like water to quench their flames. We can dispose of His holy sacrifice and even recommend to Him the souls that are to benefit from it. If we pray and offer sacrifices for the Poor Souls, and mediate for them, paying their debt through alms, fasting

and good works, how Jesus must rejoice over such loving retribution! He will note all these things in the book of His omniscience and requite them with high interest!

What thoughts, then, what feelings, what love should inspire us when, like choirs of earthly angels, we look down on the quiet, vast and sinless empire of suffering souls and, as it were, with the hands of Jesus pour out the healing balm of His blood.

No one can enter far into this field of thought without finding hundreds of springs of love and refreshment which are covered by only a thin layer for the thoughtless world but which break forth with strong streams as soon as one seeks them. Another example of the old saying: "There is an abundance of justice and goodness in the world. One must only have the gift and the will to understand it, to seek it intelligently and to receive it gratefully."



## BELIEF AMONG JEWS

Already in the Old Law we find widespread among the people the belief that the living can and should assist the dead. Clear proof of this is the famous passage in the second book of the Machabees (chap. 12, v. 39--46). Judas Machabeus had fought a bloody battle with the governor of Idumea and lost many of his men. On the following day when his soldiers prepared to bury their fallen comrades they found "under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Mania, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw that for this cause they were slain . . . And so betaking themselves to prayer they besought Him (God) that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten." Judas made a gathering and "sent 12,000 drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead," for "it is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

This incident clearly illustrates the prevailing belief of the Jews that prayer and sacrifice would benefit the dead. Moreover, the divinely inspired scriptural writer records it with approbation.





## DEVELOPMENT OF DEVOTION FROM EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA

Loving solicitude for the departed blossomed to the full in the Christian era. Besides the good works of men, the Divine Savior entrusted to His Church the precious treasure of His sacrifice in the Mass with its infinite merits of satisfaction. These are applied not only to the living so that they may offer valid expiation but also to the Poor Souls to supply for their deficiencies. More than this. Though most of the faithful on earth do not practice more penance than they require, some holy souls have done more in their zeal for penance. Their overabundant works of satisfaction in union with those of Jesus Christ constitute an inexhaustible treasury from which the Church grants indulgences for the benefit of the living and the departed. So fruitful is the charity of the Church.

The principles of this devotion are so simple and correspond so fully to human sentiment that they are seldom questioned, and the history of dogma pays comparatively little attention to them. Aside from the Gnostics and Manicheans, who rejected the entire Christian order of salvation, Arius stands alone with the contention that prayer and alms do not benefit the dead but harm the living. The Fathers of the Church expounded the true teaching which the faithful accepted without difficulty and followed zealously.

Occasional abuses and doubts afforded occasions for decisions on the part of the Church. The fourth Council of Carthage ruled that persons doing penance who died without benefit of clergy would not be deprived of prayers and Masses if otherwise they had complied with the laws of penance. The Roman Synod

of 502 declared it was a sacrilege if an administrator of Church property permitted strangers to obtain alms given by some one for the repose of his soul. Unless there is a case of suicide, the offering made for one who died as a result of a crime is not to be rejected according to the Synod of Orleans (533). The Synod of Chalons (813) prescribed that in all Masses intercession should be made for the departed and that no day be excepted from this rule. The Synod of Worms (868) ordained that prayers and offerings be made for criminals who had been executed, if they had received the sacraments before death.

These regulations sufficed to direct the intense zeal of the faithful of those days into the right channels. Only in its negotiations for reunion with the schismatic Greeks and Armenians did the Church find it necessary to insist on recognition of sound principles. We already have referred to the pledge of faith which was given by the Byzantine emperor, Michael Paleologus. This was also presented to the Greeks by the Council of Florence in 1439. Similar articles had to be accepted by Armenians in 1341.

Both the scholastics and the mystics of those days elucidated the teachings of the Church and their practical application. True, that period was also noted for new opponents such as Luther, Calvin, etc. Their errors were rejected by the Council of Trent, which included this article in the confession of faith that it prescribed for important occasions: "I firmly believe that there is a Purgatory and that the souls in Purgatory are aided by the intercession of the faithful."

The life of the Church is best exemplified by its liturgy, and in the liturgy we notice particularly the "Memento mortuorum, now prayed silently by the priest when offering Mass. Formerly in this part of the Mass the deacon read the names of those who had passed away, "professing the true faith" and who rested "in peace with the Church." Now the missal contains all the

texts of the Mass, but formerly they were divided into three books, just as today three books are used at a Pontifical High Mass.

While the words differ, the sense is the same in the corresponding texts of the oldest\*liturgy of the Orient. Concerning this agreement, St. Chrysostom wrote pertinently: "Not without reason did the apostles ordain that the departed be remembered at the celebration of the most adorable mysteries. The dead thereby obtain great benefit." (Ep. ad Philip).

Not only were the dead remembered at Mass, but the Holy Sacrifice was offered up for the repose of their souls. Already St. Cyprian attests this fact.

As to the particular days on which the Mass was offered for the departed, St. Ambrose calls attention to different customs. Some, he says, observe the third and the thirtieth days; others, the seventh and fortieth days. In the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions we read:

"With reference to the departed, psalms, readings and prayers should mark the third day in view of Him who rose on the third day; the ninth day in memory of the survivors and departed; the fortieth day, according to the example of the Old Law, as the people mourned Moses for that period. . ."

In contrast to this testimony of the Greek Church the Latin liturgy designates the third, seventh, thirtieth and the anniversary days as a time of special remembrance.

Tertullian mentions the day of death and the anniversary. St. Ambrose observed the seventh day for his brother, Satyrus saying this was a symbol of eternal rest. St. Gregory of Nazianz mentions the anniversary in his memorial concerning his brother, Caesarius. Ephraem the Syrian spoke of the thirtieth day, while in the Church of Palestine the seventh day was commemorated.

This difference in customs is easily explained. While fond

of Biblical motives, the Church had to make allowance for existing customs. Memorial days were figured from the day of death or burial. "We forget the birthday of the deceased," said St. Ambrose, "but we observe instead the day of death with solemn ceremonies." The day on which martyrs died was known as "natalitia," that is, the day of birth for eternal life.

While memorial days for individuals had been designated, the great day of commemoration for all had not yet been introduced. Many departed souls are scarcely remembered aside from the general memento of the Mass. A general memorial day seems proper—at least to us who are accustomed to it. But in the early days of the Christian era the attention of the faithful was so thoroughly centered on the central point of the liturgy, the Mass, that its various prayers made a deep impression. The daily special and general memento for the dead after the Consecration touched the hearts, especially so long as the liturgy was celebrated in the catacombs beside the graves of the martyrs and the memento was spoken aloud by the deacon. But this practice gradually disappeared and there was need of new incitement to remembrance of the departed.

This need was felt first in the monasteries, the nurseries of the liturgy, where the thought of the hereafter is ever active. St. Isidor, in his monastic rules, ordained that the Holy Sacrifice be offered for the deceased on the day after Pentecost. Presumably he was influenced by the general observance of the Feast of All Saints since 609. About 200 years later Amalar of Metz remarked that as a feast in honor of all saints is beneficial to the living, a memorial day for the departed would likewise be very desirable.

But many years passed before this thought was generally put into action. First the rule of St. Isidor was renewed and perfected in the Benedictine monastery of Cluny, which enjoyed great prestige. The Cluny congregation had monasteries in various

parts of Europe and was noted for its high standards of monastic life and zeal. Its abbots were in communication with kings and popes. Thus St. Odilo was esteemed by the greatest of his contemporaries. In 928 Abbott Odilo decreed that in all monasteries of his congregation on the day after the Feast of All Saints, the memory of those resting in Christ should be honored by singing psalms, giving of alms and especially the celebration of Mass. This custom quickly spread to other orders, especially the Carthusians. Bishops likewise followed it, and the Holy See approved the observance even in St. Odilo's time. Through the missal of Pope Pius V it was introduced in all churches of the Latin rite.

The Greek-Orthodox Church observes a similar memorial day on the Saturday before Apokreos Sunday (Septuagesima), and the Armenian Church on Easter Monday.

Even the old Mass books of the early Christian era include orations for Masses for the faithful, for priests and for bishops.

According to the Apostolic Constitutions, whose liturgy goes back to the third and fourth century, psalms as well as the Mass were offered for the dead. These psalms developed into our Office of the Dead. In the tenth century this office was recited daily not only at the monasteries of Einsiedeln and Cluny but also by secular priests. Later on this practice lagged, but Pope Pius V prescribed that wherever it had been customary, the Office of the Dead be recited on the first "free" day of the month and on every Monday in Lent and Advent that is not a feast day.

This office consists mainly of psalms and readings, the latter from the Book of Job. In his suffering, Job is a true image of human impotence and is often pictured as such in the catacombs. But Job also is a confessor of faith in the resurrection.

Closely associated with the Office of the Dead is the prayer for the dying. At the deathbed of the child the love of the mother finds expression in the tenderest words as if she could

thereby keep it alive. The Church is a mother, and at the death she thinks of the eternal life for which she gave new birth to her child in baptism.

The "commendatio animae" in the Ritual is a grand, deep-felt explanation of that commendation of soul which the Savior made for Himself and for members of His mystical body, the Church, when He said: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

The reader may think that we have deviated from the subject, the history of devotion for the Poor Souls. But this devotion stems from the cross. When the Savior commended His spirit to his Father, he pleaded not only for Himself but also for all who believe in him. Must the Church not imitate this prayer of her dying Bridegroom and continue it for her children until they attain to glory? The anxiety of the mother for her child continues until it is safe in paradise. Since she does not receive any revelation as to the fate of the individual, she prays unceasingly for all to the end of time, leaving it to the zeal of the faithful to remember certain ones in particular.

Though the Church is concerned first of all with the soul, she believes in the resurrection of the body also and, therefore lays the body to rest with proper ceremonies. Cemeteries are blessed and often are situated next to the Church. St. Augustine was asked whether the place of burial had any influence on the lot of souls in the hereafter. True, he replied, the place itself is immaterial, otherwise the martyrs would be at a great disadvantage. However, proper care for the remains of the dead is dictated by human sentiment as well as by the Christian conviction that the body of a baptized person has been the temple of the Holy Ghost and is destined for heavenly bliss.

The place of burial, said St. Augustine further, reminds us of the departed that we may make intercession for them through the Mass, prayer and alms giving. If the dead are buried near the

memorials to the martyrs, i. e., the churches, they benefit thereby, as the living commend them to the intercession of the saints in Heaven.

In the history of the early Christian era we find many references to the devotion for the Poor Souls. In the acts of the martyrs, Felicitas and Perpetua (202 A. D.), we read that the latter, while in prison, had a vision of her deceased brother, Dinocrates, as suffering in Purgatory. After she had prayed day and night for him, she had another vision indicating that he had been released.

Eusebius tells us how Emperor Constantine the Great wished to be buried in a church which he had erected in Constantinople so that he might be remembered at Mass and in the prayers of the faithful.

When his remains were borne to the grave, they were accompanied by a multitude of people who manifested their love for him not only in tears but also in prayers for the repose of his soul. After the death of Emperor Theodosius, St. Ambrose addressed these remarkable words to his people:

"I loved him. Therefore, I wish to accompany him into the land of the living and not leave him until, through tears and prayers, I have brought him to the holy mount of the Lord" (De obitu Theodosii).

Beautiful and touching are the words which St. Hieronymus addressed to Pammachius at the death of the latter's wife, Paulina:

"Other husbands strew violets, roses, lilies and purple flowers on the graves of their wives. Our Pammachius sprinkles the holy ashes and venerable remains with the balm of alms. Through these colors and scents he warms the ashes, for he knows that it is written: 'As water quenches fire, so alms wipe out sin'."

St. Paulinus of Nola had a good friend, Bishop Delphinus,

to whom he recommended the soul of his deceased brother, saying: "Be sure to obtain forgiveness (for him) through your prayers so that, like dew, refreshment may trickle on his soul, even if it be only a drop from the little finger of your holy hands."

Such quotations may seem repetitious, but they offer proof of the devotion for the Poor Souls in the early Christian era. They also are most consoling for us and rob death of much of its bitterness. Hence, with the reader's indulgence we will quote a few more apposite statements. St. Augustine says with reference to the care for the deceased:

"We must not omit the prayers for the souls of the departed which the Church has ordained for a general memento of all those who died in the Christian and Catholic Communion, so that the one common mother may intercede for them if there are no parents, children, relatives or friends to plead for them."

"The offering of the Holy Sacrifice," writes St. Gregory the Great, "benefits the souls after the death so much that sometimes they seem to request it."

St. Mathilda had Mass offered up daily for her deceased husband, King Henry I, and she and her trusted servant, Richburga, often rose at midnight to pray for him in the chapel of the castle. Her last request was that her nephew, William, Archbishop of Mayence, would often offer up Mass for her, her husband and her son. Emperor Lothar had Mass read daily for the deceased, attended the Holy Sacrifice, and recommended the Poor Souls to the mercy of God for the sake of the passion of Christ.

Though persecutions of the Church have destroyed foundations for Masses for the Poor Souls, the faithful continually for centuries have set aside bequests for this purpose. Some people of means have established convents and monasteries where their bodies were buried and their souls constantly remembered in prayer and at Mass.



## FRATERNITIES AND MASS LEAGUES

Well known, too, are special fraternities for the purpose of remembering the departed.

Records of such fraternities from the eighth and ninth centuries contain the names of not only monks but also of their benefactors. Such a book was called "liber vitae" because the graces which it implied gave promise of having one's name entered in the book of eternal life. Prelates were accustomed to join such fraternities. The bishops and abbots who assembled at Dingolfing about 770 adopted this resolution:

"When one of the undersigned passes away, every bishop and abbot who has signed this agreement must have 100 Masses and as many psalteria sung in the cathedral of the abbey church. He himself must offer 30 Masses or have them celebrated by his clergy. For each deceased priest or monk, the bishop or abbot must read 30 Masses and as many psalteria."

Many such Mass leagues exist today among the secular and religious clergy. Catholic lay organizations include among their benefits the offering of Masses for deceased members. They are imitating in this respect the guilds of the Middle Ages.

A daily custom with many Catholics is to apply indulgences to the Poor Souls. There is irrefutable evidence of this practice in the fifteenth century, but the custom goes back much farther. Catholic historical experts doubt reports dating from the ninth and tenth century. However, it is a fact that in the thirteenth century many scholastics discussed and defended the application of indulgences to the Poor Souls. At that time the devotion to the Poor Souls was so widely prevalent that it led to the introduction of a special feast for their remembrance.

Indulgences that may be applied to the souls in Purgatory have been greatly increased with the centuries. Even more numerous are those which were granted for the spiritual welfare of the living faithful but may be applied to the departed.

The degree to which indulgences as well as Masses benefit the departed depends to some extent on the penitential disposition with which they died. A plenary indulgence would suffice to wipe out all the remaining guilt of a suffering soul, but we have no certainty as to how far and how soon an indulgence is applied.



## GREGORIAN MASSES.

St. Gregory the Great, while still head of St. Andrew's Abbey in Rome, had 30 Masses read on successive days for a deceased monk named Justus. On the thirtieth day Justus appeared to his living brother and told him that he had on that very day been delivered from Purgatory. As a result of this incident the practice of the Thirty Gregorian Masses spread rapidly.

The altar on which the first Gregorian Masses were read and on which St. Gregory is said to have offered Masses for the departed, received special veneration. It is located in the Monastery of Monte Celio, now named for St. Gregory. Confident that Masses offered at this altar would be particularly beneficial to the Poor Souls, priests in large numbers applied for its use especially during the octave of All Souls Day. In the course of time the Holy See gave to this altar the privilege of a plenary indulgence. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Popes accorded this privilege to altars dedicated to other saints. These altars became known as "Gregorian Altars."

Sometimes the faithful request six Gregorian Masses. This custom seems to derive from the fact that in many convents it was common practice to offer Masses on Sunday for the people and to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice on the six other days of the week for the deceased. No privilege attaches to this custom.



## HEROIC ACT

Love is inventive and it utilizes the little things of daily life to show its devotion. Hence solicitude for Poor Souls led to the so-called Heroic Act in the early Christian ages. Thus we learn that St. Nicholas of Toledo offered up daily all his prayers, acts of penance and especially the Mass for the Poor Souls. Father Ferdinand de Monroy bequeathed to them in writing at his death all the Masses which would be read for his soul, all works of penance and all indulgences offered for him.

The Blessed Virgin herself inspired the venerable Cardinal Ximenes to make this heroic bequest. St. Francis de Sales left no day go by without special remembrance of the Poor Souls and frequently criticized severely the indifference of men toward the departed. To persons so devoid of charity he applied the saying: "Out of sight, out of mind."

Toward the close of the eighteenth century Caspar Oliden, a member of the Theatine congregation in Spain, undertook "to offer to God for the early release of the Suffering Souls all meritorius works of his life and likewise all works and prayers of intercession for him after death." With childish piety he entrusted them to the Blessed Virgin that she might apply them to those Poor Souls whom she, in her motherly wisdom and love, wished to see liberated from Purgatory.

This is the origin of the Heroic Act of Charity. Substantially it had been practiced by some pious souls prior to this time. But since heroic Father Oliden, moved by an ardent benevolence toward the Suffering Souls, formulatd it clearly, daily renewed it in his heart and devoted his life to spreading it, this act has been formally accepted by innumerable members of the laity,

religious, priests and bishops. It has been enriched with generous indulgences by Pope Pius VI (1788) and Pope Pius IX (1854).

He who makes this act can gain a plenary indulgence for the Poor Souls as often as he receives Holy Communion, visits a church and recites prayers prescribed for a plenary indulgence, six Our Fathers and Hail Mary's for the Pope's intention. He also can gain this indulgence on every Monday—or on Sunday if otherwise prevented—by hearing Mass and reciting the indulgence prayers. Moreover, the faithful who make this act and are loyal to it may bestow on the Poor Souls all the other indulgences which they can merit—a unique privilege. The priests furthermore enjoy daily the "personal privilege of the altar." For children and the faithful who are unable to receive Holy Communion the confessors who have received explicit authority may prescribe some good work.

He who makes the heroic act does not take a vow and may rescind his gift at any moment. No special formula is prescribed for the act, and an act of the will suffices. However, daily renewal is recommended. It is not essential to entrust one's merit to the Blessed Virgin. The one indispensable condition is that one offer all present works of satisfaction and all indulgences and likewise all assistance to be received after death, for the souls in Purgatory.

You may ask: "Is it not imprudent to expose oneself to the danger of extending one's time in Purgatory?" True, in one respect a person making the act may suffer loss; but it is only something temporary and relatively brief. There is no comparison between the temporary loss and the eternal gain. The Heroic Act is meritorious and is blessed even on earth with new graces shortening our Purgatory and increasing our glory in heaven forever. This merit we can not give away.

The really charitable man is not so anxious about his own

welfare. He acts on the promise of the Savior: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." God's omnipotence knows how to regard such charity. If in our charity we find ways and means of assisting the Poor Souls, then the all-wise God certainly knows how to help us in turn. Nor do the liberated souls forget their benefactor, while the saints at the throne of God look joyously and benevolently on the earthly pilgrims who, with St. Paul, are "anathema" for their brothers, that is, make satisfaction to God's justice for the misdeeds of others.

At all times the Church has had heroic children who were not content to make moderate use of her means for assisting the Poor Souls but literally offered themselves out of compassion for their suffering brothers and sisters.



## THE SPIRIT OF THIS DEVOTION

In dealing with the spirit of this devotion, let us first consider the particular liturgical prayers and then the devotion in general.

The Church's principal means of aiding the Poor Souls is the Mass. It always is offered for all the living and deceased members of the Church, but a Requiem Mass may be celebrated specially for the departed on days which have no "festum duplex." The solicitude and sorrowful intercession of the Church are voiced by the Dies Irae, which pictures the terrors of the judgment.

The significance of the Requiem Mass is best indicated by this prayer from the Offertory:

"O Lord Jesus Christ, king of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of Hell and from the deep pit: deliver them from the mouth of the lion that Hell may not swallow them up, and they may not fall into darkness; but may the holy standard bearer, Michael, introduce them to the holy light, which Thou didst promise of old to Abraham and his seed."

Here we see applied in a most consoling manner a mystery of our faith which is too little appreciated. In view of the prayers and passion of His only begotten Son, God bestowed many graces even before the redemption of mankind was completed. Similarly He grants contrition to the dying sinner in consideration of the prayers of the faithful and the Church.

St. Chrysostom, the famous bishop of Constantinople and a Father of the early Church, says in one of his homilies that we should rather come to the assistance of the departed through

prayer and good works than to mourn them without being consoled. He adds:

"Not in vain do we recall the dead in the divine mysteries. Not in vain do we approach the altar and pray for them to the Lamb which takes away the sins of the world. They receive solace from this. If Job purified his children by offering sacrifice to God for them, how much more must the sacrifice which we offer for the deceased alleviate their condition? The Mass is a common sacrifice of expiation from which all benefit. At Mass we pray for the whole world and remember the dead, with the martyrs, the confessors and the priests, for we form one body, though some members give more light than others. Forgiveness may be obtained for them through prayers, sacrifice offered for them and through the help of those who are mentioned with them. Why, then, remain in your sorrow? Why your complaints? Can you thereby win such a great grace for the departed?"

In the Offertory of the Mass the Church prays thus:

"We offer to Thee, O Lord, sacrifices of praise and prayers: do Thou receive them in behalf of those souls whom we commemorate this day: grant them, O Lord, to pass from death to that life which Thou didst promise of old to Abraham and to his seed."

In addition to the Mass, the Church has a special Office of the Dead. This is another proof of the fervent love and devotion with which the Church champions the cause of her suffering children at the throne of God. A beautiful illustration of this is the circumstance that the one who recites the Office almost everywhere speaks in the name of the Poor Souls, who plead with him and through him for God's mercy.

Good parents have an inexpressible longing to assist their suffering sons away from home. Similar are the feelings of Our Divine Lord towards the Poor Souls whom He loves so ten-



derly. True, His Sacred Heart can not feel sorrow in heaven, but it experiences everything else that moves a compassionate heart eager to r e n d e r assistance. Accordingly He urges the Church, His bride, to not forget Him and His children, to pay the debt of the departed and to liberate the poor prisoners.

Well has she understood Him. It is the spirit of the divine heart of Jesus which incessantly urges the Church to pray and be concerned for the Poor Souls. She prays for them daily at Mass at thousands of altars. In prayers, during the day, she pleads insistently for them and always ends her supplications with the cry: "And may the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace!" Every Sunday at the Asperges before High Mass she leads the faithful in spirit to the cemetery to remind them of the Poor Souls and to offer common prayer for them. She lets no day go by without remembering them after the evening Angelus and calling to us in the name of the suffering souls: Take pity on us and ask God's mercy for us!

So much for the spirit of the Church in her liturgical prayers for the Poor Souls. Now let us consider the spirit of the devotion itself.



## PROMOTES VIRTUE

Father William Faber, a special friend of the Poor Souls, calls this devotion the central point in which all Catholic devotions unite. He says it promotes all virtues especially the theological virtues, in an heroic degree and furthers the spiritual life more than does any other devotion.

This devotion strengthens our faith in the supernatural life, in the virtues of the sacraments, the Mass, the communion of saints and the Church's power to remit sins.

It confirms our hope, for all our prayers and actions for the suffering souls are based on childish confidence in the fidelity of God, the supernatural motive of Christian hope. We expect mercy for the Poor Souls because we pray for them and we offer prayers and good works for them because we rely completely on God.

Through this devotion we practice charity in an eminent degree because we assist those to attain the highest Good whom God Himself loves exceedingly, and we do this because He loves them and because we wish to honor and praise Him.

Furthermore, we honor and imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary and the angels and saints whose love for the suffering souls is beyond human words. We aid in increasing the Church triumphant and thereby the number of our intercessors with God. We gain friends in heaven who are grateful in the highest degree.

Another fruit of this devotion is that it leads us to fill many duties toward God and the saints. There is a similarity here to indulgences. In a hundred different ways they tend toward the same goal of contrition and betterment of life. In the de-

gree in which these are attained there flow from them innumerable glorious and beneficial works of piety.

This devotion, says Father Faber, "is so full of doctrine, and embodies so much that is supernatural, that we need not be surprised at the influence it exercises over the spiritual life. In the first place, it is hidden work from first to last. We do not see the results, so that there is little food for vain-glory; neither is it a devotion, the exercise of which appears in any way before the eyes of others. It implies, moreover, an utter ignoring of self, by making away with our own satisfactions and indulgences, and keeping up a tender interest in an object which does not directly concern ourselves.

"It is not only for the glory of God, but it is for His greater glory, and for His sole glory. It leads us to think purely of souls, which it is very difficult to do in this material world, and to think of them, too, simply as spouses of Jesus. We thus gain a habit of mind which is fatal to the spirit of the world and to the tyranny of human respect, while it goes far to counteract the poison of self-love. The incessant thought of the Holy Souls keeps before us a continual image of suffering, and not a merely passive suffering, but of a joyful conformity to the will of God under it. Yet this is the very genius of the Gospel, the very atmosphere of holiness."



## MEANS OF PRACTICING DEVOTION

The means of assisting the Poor Souls are aptly summarized by Venerable Bede when he attributes these words to an angel: "The prayers of the living, their alms and fasting and especially the celebration of Mass enable many to be liberated before the day of judgment."

The expiatory value of the Mass is illustrated by St. Cyrilus of Jerusalem in this comparison: "Suppose a king banished subjects who had offended him, and their relatives offered him a crown by way of satisfaction. Would the sovereign not be inclined to forgive the offenders? Similarly, though sinners, we entreat God for the departed and offer Him not a mere crown but His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, who bled for our and their sins. Surely the merciful God will be lenient with us and with them."

St. Gregory the Great relates a happening which convinced him of the great effectiveness of the Mass in liberating Poor souls. A valiant man had been captured and taken far from his home. For a long time his wife had no news of him. Thinking he had died, she had Mass read for him each week. Finally, the prisoner was freed and returned home. He told his friends that once every week his fetters were loosed for a while. Investigation revealed that this had occurred at the very hour on the day when Mass was offered for him.

"When Mass is celebrated," wrote St. Chrysostom, of Constantinople, "the angels of heaven hasten to open the prisons of Purgatory."

Blessed Henry of Suso, a famous monk and preacher, had a beloved friend in his student days. When they had to part,

he tells us, they "agreed that when one of them died, the survivor would be loyal to him after death and would celebrate for him two Masses a week for one year . . . Something over a year later the friend died, but he (Henry of Suso) had forgotten his promise of certain Masses, although he faithfully remembered his friend. While he meditated in the chapel one morning his chum appeared to him and said: "Oh, friend, how disloyal! How you have forgotten me!" He replied: 'But I remember you every day in my Mass.' The dead friend retorted: "That is not enough. Keep your promise of Masses so that the innocent blood may trickle down and quench my severe Purgatory. Then I soon will be released!" He (Henry) did so faithfully and with sorrow for his forgetfulness, and the other soon was freed." (Diepenbrock, chap. 45, p. 127).

Besides the Mass, the most important means of assisting the Poor Souls, we have at our disposal prayer, fasting and alms giving—in short, all our intercourse with God, works of self denial, patience in trials, works of mercy, spiritual and corporal. If we are in the state of grace and unite these works with the merits of Jesus Christ, they have expiatory value. We may offer these to God with the petition that He apply them to the Poor Souls according to his mercy and wisdom. We cannot demand this application, but we may confidently ask it, as the merciful God hears the prayers of His children for each other.

We can not only offer to God our merits of satisfaction for the Poor Souls, but we can also beseech Him to be merciful to them in their dire need and helplessness. We can do this through an ejaculation such as "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord," or an Our Father, a Rosary, or a decade of the beads, the Office of the Dead, etc., according to the time at our disposal.

Our satisfactory merits may be only a few drops of water sprinkled into the insatiable flames, but God places at our dis-

posal also the merits of Christ and those of the saints to be transmitted through indulgences to the Poor Souls.

And who could describe the hunger and thirst of the Poor Souls for this refreshing assistance! The Fathers of the Church picture for us angels at the altars dipping golden vases into the chalice with the precious blood of Christ and pouring it out over the flames of Purgatory, where every moment souls are made clean and wing their way upward to the eternal mansions. A beautiful but feeble picture of the joy which we can create in Purgatory by likewise pouring out this treasury over the suffering souls.

"My dear, son," said St. Louis, King of France, on his deathbed, "let Masses be celebrated for my poor soul and have prayers offered throughout the kingdom and let me share in all your good works." Thus spoke a holy man at the moment when he entered eternity. (Huguet, "Devotion to the Holy Eucharist," p. 390).

St. Thomas of Acquin had a sister who died while she was abbes at Capau. She repeatedly appeared to her brother and asked him to intercede for her to hasten her deliverance from Purgatory. Likewise St. Malachy, Bishop of Armagh, lost a beloved sister for whom he prayed much and read Masses. But when he concluded that she was in heaven and consequently omitted his customary prayers for the repose of her soul, he saw in a dream a man who told him that his sister had stood hungry and complaining outside the church for 30 days. St. Malachy resumed his intercession and again offered Mass for her. Now she appeared herself, still in mourning but near the entrance of the church. After continuing his prayers and Masses for some time, the saint beheld her dressed in white, yet still distant from the altar. Again after another period of intercession for her she appeared at his altar in the midst of blessed

spirits and he justly concluded that now she had entered eternal joy. (Huguet, 187).

Offering up of Holy Communion is likewise much desired by the Poor Souls, as it gives them relief. Pious and erudite Louis Blossius tells of a servant of God seeing a Poor Soul which was wrapped in flames and suffered terribly because of lukewarmness in the reception of Holy Communion. He was told that, if he would communicate once for the soul's intention, it would be freed. He complied and soon beheld the soul brighter than the sun in eternal glory.

Especially instructive in this regard is the experience of Blessed Catherine Emmerich. From early youth she had offered many of her prayers for the Poor Souls in Purgatory, and, as we noted previously, they came in large numbers to seek her assistance. To make her intercession through penance more effective she knelt in the snow in winter time and prayed with outstretched arms until they almost were frozen stiff. Sometimes she knelt on a sharp-edged piece of wood or scourged herself.

"While I was still a child," she writes, "I was led by an unknown person (presumably her guardian angel) to a place that appeared to be Purgatory. I saw there many souls in great agony who begged for my prayers. I was touched, for they were such quiet and sad persons whose faces indicated that they still had joy in their hearts and thought of God's mercy. I felt that they had great interior pain. If I prayed ardently for them, I heard voices which said: 'I thank you, I thank you!'"

Her intercourse with the Poor Souls was guided by her guardian angel, who not only gave her strength and patience and confidence but also led her through Purgatory so that she might see the relief she brought and distribute the benefits of her penance and prayers.

"The angel," she writes, "exhorted me to donate to the Poor

Souls every act of self denial and privation. For they cannot help themselves and are so cruelly forgotten and neglected . . . I was filled with terror at the gross neglect and waste of graces, which are offered in such abundance through the Church to mankind but which are so little appreciated while the suffering souls pine away in longing for them."





## STATE OF GRACE REQUIRED

What is the condition under which our devotion will benefit the suffering souls? We must be in the state of grace, that is free from mortal sin. The degree of our merit for the Poor Souls depends not only on the importance of the work itself but also on the ardor of our love of God with which we perform it.

Devotion for the Poor Souls often is rewarded even on earth in a temporal as well as spiritual manner. In the breviary we are told of an act of mercy to them that was decisive for the entire life of St. Peter Damian. While a mere boy, he lost his parents and was given in charge of a hard-hearted brother, who treated him cruelly and denied him even necessary clothing and food. One day Peter found a coin of no value. In his need he thought of many things to buy. However, he remembered those poorer than himself and gave the coin to a priest as a stipend for a Mass for the Poor Souls. From then on his lot changed completely. He was taken in by another brother, who was kind-hearted and whose solicitude enabled Peter to study for the priesthood and later become the great saint and cardinal. (Huguet, 182).

While Peter Damian derived temporal and spiritual benefits in life from his pity for the Poor Souls, Joachim de Sanctis, a physician of more modern days in Rome, was signally blessed after death. From the sufferings of his patients he concluded as to the agony of the Poor Souls and daily offered up to God for them all his works. He said he would consider himself fortunate if he could give relief to only one suffering soul by being in Purgatory until the Last Judgment. For hours he would

pray with outstretched arms. After his death he appeared to a pious person and announced that, after a brief delay but without entering Purgatory, he had reached Heaven. At the same time another person saw him in company of his guardian angel who cleansed him of the remaining stains and led him to the blessed.

How grateful the Poor souls are for prayers on their behalf, is evident from a vision of Blessed Marina of Escobar. A noble lady for a long time had prayed tearfully for the spiritual welfare of her son.

For this intention she finally promised to assist a poor girl, a niece of Blessed Marina, to enter an Augustinian convent. However, when death overtook her before she could carry out this resolution, she entrusted fulfillment of her promise to her erring son. He complied with her orders, but continued his dissolute life and soon afterward was murdered.

Marina feared for his eternal welfare, and some days later saw his soul in torment in Purgatory. Glad that he had not been condemned, she asked in surprise: "How is it that you are there?" He replied: "A short time before my death my deceased mother appeared to me and admonished me: 'My son, be reconciled with God, for you are about to meet with a great misfortune.' With God's grace I was sorry for my sins and earnestly resolved to improve my life. Meanwhile I was slain and God mercifully sent me to Purgatory, where I suffer unutterable pain. Have pity on me."

The influence of this devotion on those practicing it is illustrated by the life of Blessed Mary of the Angels, a Discalced Carmelite nun who died in 1717 in the Convent of St. Christina in Turin and was beatified in 1865. A near relative of St. Aloysius, she was intent from her early years on preserving her innocence and had fervent devotion to the passion of Christ. She was eager to assist the Poor Souls, and our Lord repeatedly

revealed to her the nature and intensity of their sufferings. They frequently appeared to her and told of their agony. Her biography states that her prayers and works of mortification for them were innumerable.

The first person to appear to her was Sister Isabella of the Cross, who thanked her for her remembrance and informed her that she would have to suffer until a bequest of a relative was carried out. She requested Blessed Mary to hasten this and indicated the very room and even the spot where the will was hidden. The humble nun did not have the courage to tell of the vision. However, the Poor Soul appeared again and conjured her not to prolong her torment, touching her face with a glowing finger and leaving a burnt mark. Relatives were notified, but they could not locate the will. Once more the suffering soul visited Blessed Mary and told her that the document had fallen behind a certain drawer. There it was found.

In St. Theresa's Convent in Turin there died in 1692, Father John of the Cross, a religious who had strictly observed the rule. He, too, appeared in the midst of flames and begged Blessed Mary for assistance. She immediately offered many prayers and acts of penance and had the joy of seeing his soul ascend into heaven.

She realized that the Mass offers the greatest relief to the Poor Souls. For this reason she gathered alms for Mass stipends or made vestments and sent them to a priest suggesting that in return he offer Mass for the Poor Souls. During her last term as prioress she promised the Poor Souls five Masses a month while she was in office. However, the sister counsellor pointed out that this would be most difficult for the poor convent. God Himself provided the means as an indication of His pleasure in this great charity. That same day a man came to the convent and left stipends for several Masses according to the intention of Blessed Mary.

She was in constant communication with Poor Souls who pleaded for her prayers and sacrifices in their behalf. One day a Poor Soul appeared to her and revealed that it was in great torments as it had not sufficiently expiated evil talk concerning others. Moved by compassion, Blessed Mary offered herself to divine justice for this suffering soul. Soon she was afflicted with severe toothaches, fever and convulsions. Physicians gave her medicines and applied poultices which aggravated her condition. She appeared as if covered with leprosy from head to foot. The doctors admitted that medical science could give her no assistance. In spite of all these sufferings, Blessed Mary's face was like transfigured with joy. She seemed to be in ecstasy and in lively conversation with several persons. Questioned by her confessor, she explained that they were Poor Souls, whom she had to liberate. When she had recovered sufficiently that she could go to Holy Communion with the other nuns, she had a vision in which she beheld a large number of formerly suffering souls ascending into heaven.

Those who were intimately associated with her stated that virtually all her deceased acquaintances came to either ask her intercession or to thank her for having aided their liberation from the torments of Purgatory. Souls appeared to her at all times of the day or night—in church, in the refectory, etc. Sometimes they woke her at night and begged for her prayers and good works.

Many of these visits were accompanied by extraordinary graces. Now she was privileged to view the glory to be enjoyed by souls whom she was assisting. Then again they strengthened her in trials, guided her in dangers and advised her concerning her spiritual life or the affairs of the convent. If the sufferings she had assumed for them seemed unbearable and Nature cried for consideration then she would see the Divine Savior who was laden with a huge cross on His bleeding should-

ers and who said: "See, My daughter, what I endured and the bed on which I was laid for love of you."

These instances and experiences indicate what a tremendous power God has placed in our hands to assist the Poor Souls by every good work in every state of life. We can offer up for them all the sufferings and merits of Jesus Christ. We can have Mass read or assist at it or them. We can pray and do penance for them and offer up the expiatory value of our simplest daily actions, disappointments and suffering. We can donate to them almost all indulgences to be gained, and many of these are more easily obtained for them than for ourselves. Every minute of the day or night, every commonplace duty, every joy or sorrow we can make a means of shortening the sufferings of Poor Souls.

In doing this we can gain double merit for ourselves. An Our Father or Rosary recited for them brings us more blessing than if we had prayed without this intention; and God will hear us more generously because of charity and zeal for souls. By assisting them we help ourselves. By sharing our spiritual merits with them we enrich ourselves.

This devotion strengthens our faith, confirms our hope and inflames our charity. It promotes all virtues. It pleases not only the Poor Souls and the saints of heaven, but, above all, it delights the Sacred Heart of Jesus because it hastens the union of blessed souls with Him in eternal glory. God is not outdone in charity, and He will reward such service and charity one hundredfold. Jesus promised to reward even a cup of water given in His name. Would He then have no reward for the great joy which we have prepared not only for the redeemed souls but also for all in Heaven, for His dear Mother, Mary, and particularly for His Divine Heart? Truly, He will grant us a reward transcending all human understanding.

## THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

*The greatest solace and surest help to the  
Poor Souls in Purgatory*

In every need of soul and body for ourselves and others, we find salvation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

No one knows this better than the suffering souls in Purgatory. They look to the Altar with a piteousness of appeal that would melt our hearts if we could see it. They know, as we shall some day know, that it is the Mass they must chiefly look for rest and deliverance.

In their helplessness they cry to us: "Have pity upon me, at least you my friends, for the Hand of the Lord hath touched me." To honor our dead we may place flowers upon their graves, build earthly monuments to their memory, but none of these shall bring relief to the suffering souls. "If you wish to come to the aid of your departed", says St. Chrysostom, "do so by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, by prayer and almsdeeds."

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Enroll your beloved, departed ones in the Mariannahill Mission Mass League. Every day until the end of time, they will be remembered in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Every day throughout the years to come, shall their souls be remembered in the prayers and spiritual exercises of the Mariannahill Fathers, Brothers,

Sisters, native children and Christians in our Missions. No greater gift can you bestow upon them, no greater provisions can you make for yourself and your loved ones, than by enrolling them in the Mariannahill Mission Mass League.

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A donation of \$10.00 will enroll one member of your family as a perpetual Mass League member, for time and eternity.

A donation of \$25.00 will enroll your entire family, all living and deceased members, and the parents of both sides, husbands and wives, as perpetual members of the Mariannahill Mission Mass League.

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I am eager to enroll my beloved deceased ones in the Mariannahill Mission Mass League, and enclose my offering of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in full (part)

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Please send the diplama(s) to:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City and State \_\_\_\_\_

In conformity with the decree of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that all statements regarding the various supernatural facts related in this booklet, are mere private and personal opinions, and we by no means, wish to forstall the Apostolic decisions.

*The Publishers.*



