

**From the Pastor**

**October 29, 2023**

**The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**PURGATORY:** As every Catholic is aware, the month of November is the month of the Holy Souls when we pray for the faithful departed and our loved ones who have been called home to God. In fact, the Church has always granted a plenary indulgence to the faithful who visit a cemetery during the first week of November and there pray for the Holy Souls. Pope Francis has augmented this in granting the indulgence throughout the entire month of November. That is why for today's column I would like to write on Purgatory.

Every November 1<sup>st</sup> we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints, a Holyday of Obligation. The Masses will be on Tuesday evening (October 31<sup>st</sup>) at 7.00PM and on Wednesday (November 1<sup>st</sup>) at 9.00AM and 12.15PM. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, we celebrate the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. The Masses that day will be at 7.00AM, 8.00AM, and 9.00AM. There will also be our annual Mass for all who have died and were buried from our parish during the last year. That Mass will be on Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup> at 9.00AM.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, All Souls Day, every priest is permitted to celebrate three Masses. That is the case on only one other day of the year, Christmas. Consequently, among the priests November 2<sup>nd</sup> is often called "Black Christmas." The custom of the priests offering 3 Masses on All Souls Day came about during World War I. The pope at the time, Pope Benedict XV, was very much concerned that so many priests had been killed. Often these dead priests had taken offerings from the faithful for Masses for their loved ones. The pope therefore asked the priests to offer three Masses on All Souls Day to make up for all the Mass intentions which had never been offered due to the death of the priests. It must be remembered that All Souls Day is not a Holyday of Obligation.

Many may recall the Funeral solemnities for the late Queen Elizabeth II last year. They were most impressive. Even those who have no faith were aware that something very sacred was being enacted before their eyes. The Queens coffin, surrounded by the catafalque candles of unbleached wax, the black coped Bishops with simple linen miters, the lovely note of the present king written on black bordered stationery and placed on the coffin, all reminded us that mourning is a healing journey. For those who have abandoned the traditional mourning customs there is never a healing but a bitterness that accompanies them all through life.

Purgatory (Latin, "purgare", to make clean, to purify) in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.

The faith of the Church concerning purgatory is clearly expressed in the Decree of Union drawn up by the Council of Florence, and in the decree of the Council of Trent which defined: *"Whereas the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit, has from the Sacred Scriptures and the ancient tradition of the Fathers taught in Councils and very recently in this Ecumenical synod that there is a purgatory, and that the souls therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar; the Holy Synod enjoins on the Bishops that they diligently endeavor to have the sound doctrine of the Fathers in Councils regarding purgatory everywhere taught and preached, held and believed by the faithful."* Further than this the definitions of the Church do not go, but the tradition of the Fathers and scholars must be consulted to explain the teachings of the councils, and to make clear the belief and the practices of the faithful.

That **temporal punishment** is due to sin, even after the sin itself has been pardoned by God, is clearly the teaching of Scripture. God indeed brought man out of his first disobedience and gave him power to govern all things (Wisdom 10:2), but still condemned him "to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow" until he returned unto dust. God forgave the incredulity of Moses and Aaron, but in punishment kept them from the "land of promise" (Numbers 20:12). The Lord took away the sin of David, but the life of the child was forfeited because David had made God's enemies blaspheme His Holy Name (2 Samuel 12:13-14). In the New Testament as well as in the Old, almsgiving and fasting, and in general penitential acts are the real fruits of repentance (Matthew 3:8; Luke 17:3; 3:3). The whole penitential system of the Church testifies that the voluntary assumption of penitential works has always been part of true repentance and the Council of Trent (Sess. XIV, can. xi) reminds the faithful that God does not always remit the whole punishment due to sin together with the guilt. God requires satisfaction, and will punish sin, and this doctrine involves as its necessary consequence a belief that the sinner failing to do penance in this life may be punished in another world, and so not be cast off eternally from God.

All sins are not equal before God, nor dare anyone assert that the daily faults of human frailty will be punished with the same severity that is meted out to serious violation of God's law. On the other hand whosoever comes into God's presence must be perfectly pure for in the strictest sense His "eyes are too pure, to behold evil" (Habakkuk 1:13). For un-repentent venial faults for the payment of

temporal punishment due to sin at time of death, the Church has always taught the doctrine of purgatory. So deep was this belief ingrained in our common humanity that it was accepted by the Jews, and in at least a shadowy way by the pagans, long before the coming of Christianity.

In Origen the doctrine of purgatory is very clear. If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. "For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3); but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into heaven with your wood and hay and stubble and thus defile the kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood and hay and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions and then returns to us the reward of our great works." (P.G., XIII, col. 445, 448).

St. Augustine describes two conditions of men; "some there are who have departed this life, not so bad as to be deemed unworthy of mercy, nor so good as to be entitled to immediate happiness" etc., and in the resurrection he says there will be some who "have gone through these pains, to which the spirits of the dead are liable" (*City of God* XXI.24). Thus, at the close of the fourth century:

- not only were prayers for the dead found in all the Liturgies, but the Fathers asserted that such practice was from the Apostles themselves;
- those who were helped by the prayers of the faithful and by the celebration of the Holy Mysteries (Holy Mass) were in a place of purgation;
- from which when purified they "were admitted unto the Holy Mount of the Lord".

It is the traditional faith of Catholics that the souls in purgatory are not separated from the Church, and that the love which is the bond of union between the Church's members should embrace those who have departed this life in God's grace. Hence, since our prayers and our sacrifices can help those who are still waiting in purgatory, the saints have not hesitated to warn us that we have a real duty toward those who are still in purgatorial expiation. Holy Church through the Congregation of Indulgences, 18 December 1885, has bestowed a special blessing on the so-called "heroic act" in virtue of which "a member of the Church militant offers to God for the souls in purgatory all the satisfactory

works which he will perform during his lifetime, and also all the suffrages which may accrue to him after his death" (Heroic Act, vol. VII, 292). The practice of devotion to the dead is also consoling to humanity and eminently worthy of a religion which seconds all the purest feelings of the human heart. "Sweet", says Cardinal Wiseman (lecture XI), *"is the consolation of the dying man, who, conscious of imperfection, believes that there are others to make intercession for him, when his own time for merit has expired; soothing to the afflicted survivors the thought that they possess powerful means of relieving their friend. In the first moments of grief, this sentiment will often overpower religious prejudice, cast down the unbeliever on his knees beside the remains of his friend and snatch from him an unconscious prayer for rest; it is an impulse of nature which for the moment, aided by the analogies of revealed truth, seizes at once upon this consoling belief. But it is only a flitting and melancholy light, while the Catholic feeling, cheering though with solemn dimness, resembles the unfailing lamp, which the piety of the ancients is said to have hung before"*

During this month be sure to pray for the souls of our loved ones in purgatory and be sure to have Masses offered for them.

In Jesus and Mary,

***Monsignor James F. Pereda***