



## What exactly is Purgatory?

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "All who die in God's grace, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo a time of purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven". (CCC# 1030-1031). Before the Faithful Departed can enter Heaven they must be purified. Our prayers can help them in that process. Sacred Scripture and Tradition repeatedly affirm that God's ultimate intention is for us to become perfect, as He is perfect (Matt 5:48). Why? Because God wants us to live forever in unity with Him in Heaven, and He Himself is completely holy ---without sin, imperfection, or stain of any kind.

*(But didn't Christ die to forgive us our sins and save us?)* Yes, but even those who have escaped Hell because of the infinite merits of Jesus' saving of us, find that sin during life has many consequences. It disorders our souls; it injures others, and it leaves us attached to things we have chosen at times to love more than we love God. If we are to live with God forever, then repairs and reparations are necessary >>> that is, we must be healed, and we must make amends and atonement. If we tended toward selfishness in life, we must learn to love as God does. If we were deceitful, we must learn truth; if we were addicted, we must break out of its lure and hold upon us; if we were bitter or held grudges, we must perfect the ability to forgive; if we have harmed others through gossip, or self-centered pride, those wounds have to be healed and closed.

Suppose for example a driver injures him/herself and totals another person's car in a collision because of reckless driving. As the ambulance arrives at the hospital, he/she expresses remorse for his/her actions to the other driver. This other driver forgives him/her >> that is, the other driver chooses to let go of the personal offense and not hold it against the guilty driver. But, there are other consequences of the reckless driver's sin must still be dealt with. Broken bones have to be set, the wrecked cars must be repaired and paid for, his/her suspended license reinstated, etc., and the Hospital bills have to be paid in full too. The process will not be a pleasant one, nor will it all be accomplished

overnight. But even in all of this, the process is restorative >>> a matter of both mercy (the repairs) and justice (the reparations). In the end the reckless driver will be a renewed person.

The truth remains that to a greater or lesser degree most of us have done some bits of "wreckage" with parts of our lives and in the lives of others. So, whether in this life or the next, God doesn't wave a magic-wand, by-passing our free will, in order to repair the situation or damages done. Instead, we undergo a process, in His mercy and justice, to undo and make reparation and repair for what we have done; paying our debts, letting go of whatever may have been sinful within us, learning to "drive aright" if you will. Of course in theory, this process has already begun in the lives of all of us here on earth. Through penance, and by accepting in faith the inescapable sufferings of this present life, we can be *purged* right here, right now, of sin's effects and grow in holiness as God Wills for all of us. Mass, prayer, the sacraments, all serve this purpose. How we participate in the process in the here and now is solely up to our own free-will.

If we look honestly and truthfully at those we know who have died, even if they were faithful to Christ and His Church, and good people, we must admit that few if any were "perfect" when they left this world. Just because someone is dead doesn't mean there's some sort of instantaneous canonization. They still need, as we ourselves probably will too, at the very least a little bit of "shine-up", a cleansing and purging "fire", as the Scripture call it (1 Cor 3:14-15). The Souls in Purgatory, called "poor" (because they can no longer merit for themselves) are also "holy" (because they are truly indeed Saved) and are assured of Salvation and Eternal Peace in the Presence of Almighty God and all the Angels and Saints. They ARE in route to Heaven!

This is precisely why we pray and offer Masses for all the Souls in Purgatory. Our intercession for them now helps them in their restoration in Purgatory; just as our prayers helped them while they were still alive on earth. No wonder then that Scripture urges us not to forget the Faithful Departed: "For it is ... a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins" (2Mc 12: 46). As the great St. Ambrose reminds us "*we loved them dearly in life; let us not abandon them until we have seen them safely into the House of the Lord.*"

The Souls in Purgatory can pray and do intercede for us though, they just can no longer do so for themselves. The human Will is "set" at the moment of our death. Unlike the living, who can and do merit for themselves, the Souls in Purgatory depend on our merciful and loving kindness toward them. It is us, the living, who still have the use of our Free-Will. It is only us (the living) who can be charitable and merciful toward those souls in Purgatory who are still undergoing their purification. We do so by offering Masses, prayers, alms, and our daily struggles and sufferings, applying our acts of charity for them. Remember that ultimately these souls are happy because they know they have been Saved and will eventually attain Heaven.

Purgatory will cease to exist at the End of Time, on that great day of the Second Coming, when Christ will come again for the General Judgment of all the living and the dead. Our bodies and souls will be reunited at that moment and our Final Destination determined.

*‘Eternal Rest grant unto them O Lord, and let Perpetual Light shine upon them;*

*May the souls of all the Faithful Departed, through the Mercy of God, Rest in Peace. Amen.’’*

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