



Both reason and faith tell us that there is a middle ground of expiation, where the soul is cleansed from all stain of sin before it can enter the glory of heaven. "There shall not enter into it anything defiled" (Apoc. 21:27). Christ said, "Amen, I say to thee, thou wilt not come out from it until thou

hast paid the last penny" (Matt. 5:26). Even persons who deny the existence of purgatory instinctively pray for their loved ones who have died. This would be great inconsistency if their reason did not tell them that their prayers would do the dead good. Prayers are useless for those in heaven or hell.

78. Existence of Purgatory

What is purgatory?—Purgatory is a place of temporary punishment for those who have died in the state of grace, but have not fully satisfied God's justice for all punishment due their sins.

1. Purgatory is a *middle state* where souls destined for heaven are detained and purified. Souls in purgatory *cannot help themselves*, for their time for meriting is past. But they can be helped by the faithful on earth, by prayers and other good works.

In some places, at eight o'clock at night, the church bells sound, to admonish the faithful to pray for the souls in purgatory. This hour is in commemoration of Christ's prayer in the garden. We should then kneel and pray one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and the *Requiem aeternam*: "Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them," etc.

2. Belief in the utility of *praying for the dead* automatically includes belief in the existence of purgatory. If there were no purgatory, it would be useless to pray for the dead, because saints in heaven need no help, and those in hell are beyond aid.

And we can be sure there will be no more purgatory after the General Judgment; because the reason for its existence will have passed.

3. Purgatory is a place of *temporary punishment* for those who have died in venial sin, or who have not fully satisfied God's justice for mortal sins already forgiven.

(a) A boy steals an apple from a stall in the market; this is a venial sin punishable in purgatory. Some argue that God is a good God, and will not punish such slight sins with the pains of purgatory. We must re-

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member, nevertheless, that the judgments of God are different from those of men, as His holiness is far above human holiness.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts." Let us reverence God's holiness and justice, as we have loving confidence in His mercy.

(b) A man commits a cruel murder. This is a mortal sin which, unrepented and unconfessed, will send him to hell.

The man repents, confesses, and obtains absolution for his sin; the guilt therefore is removed. But justice requires that he make up for the evil he has done; this atonement takes place in purgatory, unless he makes full satisfaction before death.

4. The doctrine of purgatory is eminently consoling to the human heart. It consoles us when our loved ones die. Purgatory is a bond of union making us realize that death is *not an eternal separation* for the just, but only a loss of their bodily presence.

Purgatory gives us an assurance that we are *still in touch* with our beloved dead. We are consoled by the knowledge that we can still help them with prayer, as in life we so helped them.

Is the doctrine of the existence of purgatory reasonable?—The doctrine of the existence of purgatory is not only reasonable, but its negation is eminently contrary to reason; it is taught in Holy Scripture, and has been taught by the Church from the very beginning.

1. The doctrine of a middle state of purgation is taught in *the Old Testament*, and was firmly believed in by the Hebrews.

After a battle, Judas Machabeus ordered prayers and sacrifices offered up for his slain comrades. "And making a gathering, he sent twelve drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. For, if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins" (2 Mach. 12:43-46).

2. When *Our Lord* came on earth, He purified the Jewish Church of all those human changes that with the years had crept into its usages and beliefs. But He never reproved anyone for belief in a middle state of purgation, or prayers for the dead.

On the contrary, Christ more than once implied the existence of purgatory. He said "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this world, or in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32). When Our Lord said that a sin will not be forgiven in the next life, He left us to conclude that some sins will be thus forgiven. But in the next life, sins cannot be forgiven in heaven: "There shall not enter into it anything defiled" (Apoc. 21:27). Neither can sins be forgiven in hell, for out of hell there is no redemption. They must therefore be forgiven in a middle state, Purgatory.

3. Belief in the existence of Purgatory is a continuous and solemn teaching of *the Church*. From St. Paul, the early Fathers, the Doctors of the Church, on through the ages, the Church has taught the existence of Purgatory, and the correlated doctrine of the usefulness of praying for the dead.

From the beginning Christians prayed for the dead at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The oldest books used at Mass contain prayers for the dead.

The doctrine of Purgatory was given solemn definition by the Council of Trent as follows: "There is a purgatory, and the souls there detained are assisted by the suffrages of the faithful, but especially by the most acceptable sacrifice of the altar."

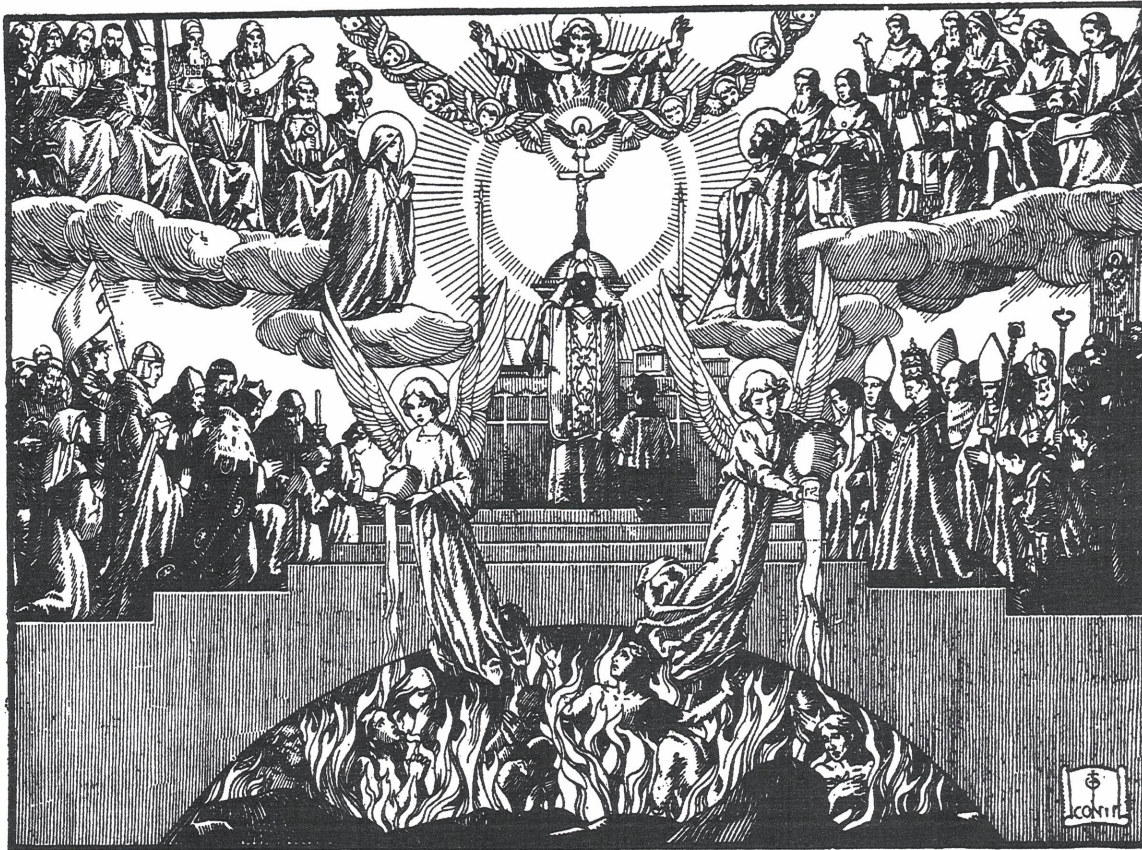
This dogmatic definition contains three points of faith that all Catholics are compelled to believe: (a) that there is a purgatory; (b) that after death souls suffer there for their sins; (c) that the living can extend assistance to such souls.

4. *Reason* demands belief in the existence of purgatory. If a man dies with some slight stain on his soul, a sin of impatience, or an idle word, is he fit to enter heaven? God's sanctity forbids it: "There shall not enter into it anything defiled" (Apoc. 21:27). But must such a soul be consigned to hell? God's mercy and justice forbid it.

Therefore reason concludes the existence of a middle and temporary state of expiation, where the soul is cleansed from all stain of sin before it can be admitted into the perfect holiness and bliss of heaven. "Amen, I say to thee, thou wilt not come out from it until thou hast paid the last penny" (Matt. 5:26).

5. Among nearly all peoples there has persisted a belief that souls must undergo some sort of purification after death. This would point to the doctrine of purgatory.

The Greek story of Prometheus implies a place of purgation. The Egyptians and others believed in the transmigration of souls. Legends and myths of all nations, as well as burial customs, indicate belief in the possibility of helping the dead.



We should be generous in helping the poor souls in purgatory, who long for God. The best thing we can do for them is to have Masses offered for them. The Church puts no limit to the time during which we may pray or offer Masses for the suffering souls in purgatory.

If we cannot have a Mass said, we should at least hear Masses for our dear departed. If God so willed, a single Mass could release all the souls in purgatory. We should offer Masses especially on All Souls' Day and on the anniversaries of death of our relatives and friends.

79. Souls in Purgatory

What pains do the souls in purgatory suffer?—The souls in purgatory suffer from a great longing to be united to God, and from other great pains.

1. Their *chief pain* is the deprivation of the Beatific Vision, the vision of God in the glory of heaven. This temporary deprivation is a most severe punishment, because the poor souls already have a full knowledge of what they are missing.

"As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after thee, O God! my soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?" (Ps. 41:2, 3).

2. The general tradition of the Church is that they also *suffer* acutely in other ways.

St. Augustine believes that the sufferings of the poor souls are greater than the sufferings of all the martyrs. St. Thomas believes the least pain there is greater than the greatest on earth.

3. The *greatness* and the *duration* of a soul's sufferings in purgatory vary according to the gravity of the sins committed. One who has lived a long life of sin, but is saved from hell only by a deathbed repentance, will stay in the purging fires of purgatory longer, and suffer there more intensely than a child, who has committed only the venial sins of an ordinary child.

That some souls stay long in purgatory is implied by the fact that the Church puts no limit to the offering of Masses for the dead; some foundations have been going on for centuries, offered for the repose of certain souls. St. Augustine believes that

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those stay longest in purgatory who have loved the goods of earth more. Some saints have held that certain holy souls in purgatory suffer no pain except their exclusion from the vision of God. Practically all are agreed that in purgatory the souls suffer most in those things in which they sinned most; as the "Imitation of Christ" says: "In what things a man hath most sinned, in those things shall he be most grievously tormented."

4. The poor souls, however, have much to *console* them. They are certain of salvation and the love of God. They are free from temptation: they cannot commit the slightest sin, even of impatience.

They have no worry, anxiety, or distress of mind, for they are sure of deliverance. They are comforted by the prayers of the angels and saints, and of the people on earth.

Will all the souls in purgatory go to heaven?—All the souls in purgatory will go to heaven some day; they will stay in purgatory only as long as they have not atoned for all their sins.

1. The poor souls *cannot help themselves*, for their time for meriting was ended at their death. They cannot therefore merit anything to satisfy for their sins.

This is why we who can still merit by our good works should give some of them as suffrage for the poor souls, so that they may soon be delivered from their prison. We have the special obligation of helping with our prayers and sacrifices the souls of our dead relatives, friends, and benefactors.

2. Although they cannot merit anything for themselves, the poor souls *intercede* for us with their prayers to God.

Thus if we help them they repay us by their intercession. No one who has a devotion to the holy souls in purgatory has ever asked for their intercession in vain.

In what ways can we help the poor souls in purgatory?—We can help the poor souls in purgatory by Masses, by prayers, and by other good works.

1. *Masses.* The Holy Sacrifice is the greatest help we can offer, because its effect depends on itself, and not on the piety of the priest who offers it. Whenever possible, *Gregorian Masses* should be offered; these consist of thirty Masses celebrated on consecutive days for some deceased person.

If we cannot have a Mass said, we should at least hear Mass for our dear departed. A Mass has infinite merit, for it is the sacrifice of Our

Lord Himself. It will surely avail our dead to offer for them God the Son Himself in Holy Mass.

2. *Prayers.* We should pray with devotion for the poor souls. God does not regard the length of the prayer or the words so much as the love in the heart of the one who prays.

There are special prayers enriched with indulgences, applicable to the souls in purgatory. We should also receive the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist for the poor souls. "Know ye that the Lord will hear your prayers if you continue in perseverance" (Judith 4:11).

3. *Alms-giving.* No pompous funeral or profusion of flowers is of any avail for the poor souls in purgatory. As St. John Chrysostom says, "Not by weeping, but by prayer and almsgiving are the dead relieved."

It is better to give to charity the money spent on idle and worldly show, which cannot help the poor souls. Instead of sending costly wreaths to the family of a dead friend, it is an excellent custom instead to have Masses offered for his soul.

4. *The Heroic Act.* By this Act a person surrenders, in behalf of the souls in purgatory, all the satisfaction made to God by his good works, including whatever satisfaction may be offered for him by others during his life and after.

The Heroic Act is enriched with precious favors. One who makes the Act can apply every indulgence gained to the poor souls in purgatory. He may gain a plenary indulgence applicable only to the poor souls: (1) each time he receives Holy Communion; (2) every Monday by hearing Mass in behalf of the poor souls. To gain these indulgences, he must pray in church for the Pope's intentions.

It is an error to suppose that one who gives up his merits, or offers prayers and good works for the poor souls, thereby loses something for himself.

Prayer confers a blessing not only on those prayed for, but also on him who prays. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

5. We should not, however, rely too much on the prayers and sacrifices that our relatives may offer for us after our death. Even granting that they will remember us often and fervently in prayers, it is nevertheless true that works offered in suffrage for souls avail them only to a limited extent.

God gives more value to a little voluntary penance done here on earth than to disciplines offered for that soul after death. As a Saint aptly said, "One Mass devoutly heard during life is worth more than a great sum left for the celebration of a hundred Masses after death."



Belief in the resurrection is very consoling. It was this belief that gave the early Christians and martyrs such fortitude under persecutions. Firm in this belief, we should not mourn for our beloved dead excessively: "But we would not, brethren, have you ignorant concerning those who are asleep, lest you should grieve, even as others who have no hope"

(1 Thess. 4:13). We shall see them again in the resurrection.

We should remember the words of Our Lord, Who will raise us from the dead: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

80. Resurrection of the Body

What is meant by the "resurrection of the body"? — By "the resurrection of the body" is meant that at the end of the world the bodies of all men will rise from the earth and be united again to their souls, nevermore to be separated.

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise" (1 Cor. 15:52).

1. Our Lord often *foretold* the resurrection of the body.

"For the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they who have done good shall come forth unto resurrection of life; but they who have done evil unto resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).

2. Our Lord said that the *Blessed Sacrament* gives immortality also to the body.

"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up" (John 6:55).

3. Christ redeemed the *whole man*, and not the soul alone.

Hence the body must, in the case of the just, rise to eternal life. The body of man was originally destined for immortality, and lost it only with Adam's sin. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made to live" (1 Cor. 15:22). "He who raised up Jesus will raise up us also with Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:14). "Our Lord Jesus Christ will refashion the body of our lowliness" (Phil. 3:21).

4. The resurrection of the body is not an extraordinary idea. If we look about us in nature, we may see *types of the resurrection of the body*.

In spring, flowers and trees wake up to new life after the death of winter. The seed, buried like a corpse in the ground, sprouts a living tree or bush. The body itself rises to new vigor after sleep, which is a type of death.

Will our risen bodies be the same as those we had on earth?—Yes, our risen

bodies will earth.

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bodies will be the same as those we had on earth.

1. If our risen bodies were not those we had on earth, they would not be our bodies, and we would not be the same persons.

It could not be said then that there was a resurrection, nor that our bodies had risen. The words of Job are most consoling in the truth they contain: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth" (Job 19:25).

2. During life the body is *constantly changing*, putting on new growth and throwing away waste in bone, muscle, and skin. Yet it is *always the same body*.

So will it be in the resurrection. Whatever changes there are, they will not affect the sameness of the body we have on earth. In death the body only sleeps, awaiting the last day. Our Lord Himself said that Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus were asleep, although He knew they were dead.

3. Our bodies will rise again even though they will have been *reduced to dust*. Everything is possible to God. He Who created angels and men and the whole universe out of nothing will certainly not find any difficulty in gathering together the elements of the body even if they were scattered throughout the world, nor in giving them life once more. God has almighty power.

Christ Himself raised three persons from the dead, according to Holy Scripture. At His resurrection, the bodies of many rose from the graves. Holy men and women have in the name of Christ brought back hundreds to life.

Why will the bodies of the just rise?—The bodies of the just will rise to share forever in the glory of their souls.

"For this corruptible body must put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53).

1. The risen body will be radiant and beautiful, if it is of a just person. It will have the qualities of Our Lord's risen Body, characterized by:

(a) Impassibility.

By this quality the risen body will no longer be subject to pain, disease, death, hunger, thirst, fatigue, sleep, heat or cold. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying" (Apoc. 21:4).

(b) Brightness.

By this quality, the risen body will shine with great radiance and glory. "Then the just will shine forth like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

(c) Agility

This quality will enable the risen body to pass with the quickness of thought to all parts of the universe.

(d) Subtility, or spirituality.

This quality will enable the risen body to penetrate material substances, even as Our Lord, Who arose from the tomb and entered the Cenacle while doors and windows were barred. "What is sown a natural body rises a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44).

2. The risen body, united to the soul, will remain in heaven forever, to glory in the presence of and in union with God.

When we are disheartened by the miseries of this life, misfortune, sickness, pains, and many other ills, including the difficulty of warding off sin, let us find consolation in the thought that our body, now so weak and imperfect, will, if we persevere in the love and service of God, some day rise in glory and stand continually in His presence. "If the earthly house in which we dwell be destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made by human hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

Has the body of any human person ever been raised from the dead and taken into heaven?—By the special privilege of her Assumption, the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary, preserved from corruption, was raised from the dead and taken into heaven.

"Assumption" in this sense means the taking up of the Blessed Virgin's body into heaven. Her Assumption differs from Christ's Ascension, in that He went up to heaven, body and soul, by His own unaided power, whereas Our Lady was taken up by the power of God, not her own. The dogma of the Assumption was proclaimed November 1, 1950.

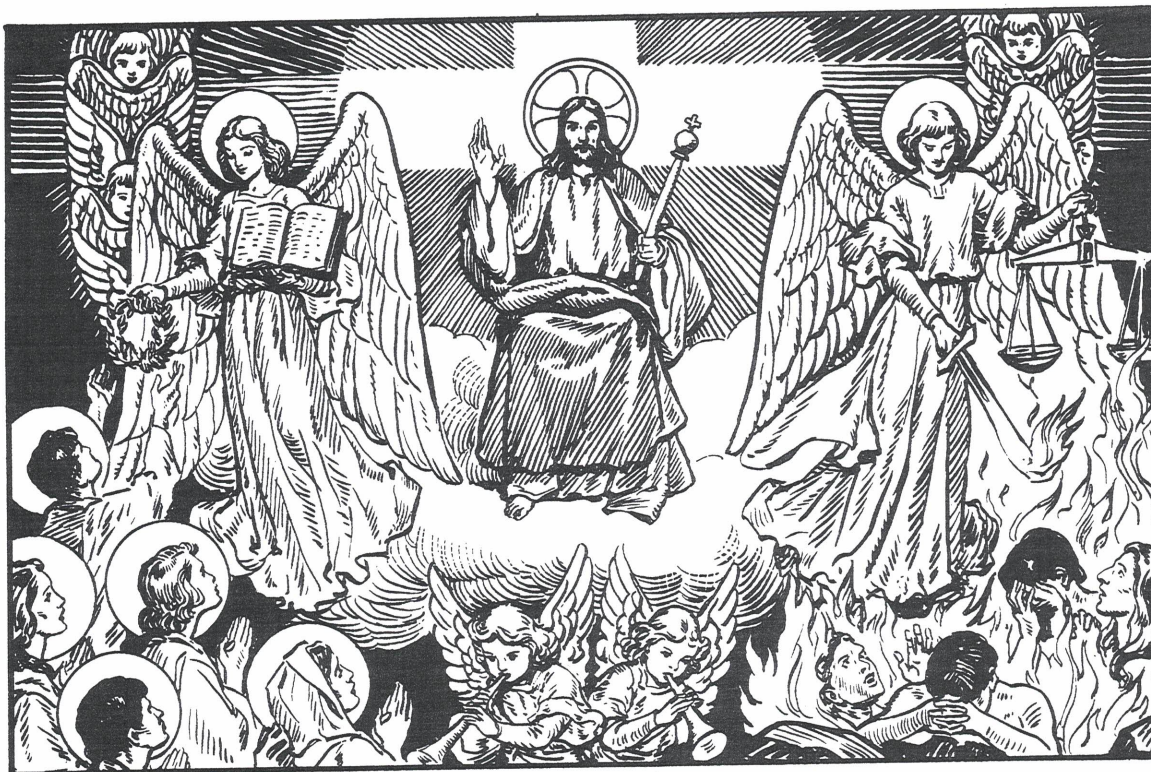
Why will the bodies of the damned also rise?—The bodies of the damned will also rise, to share in the eternal punishment of their souls.

1. The risen body of the wicked will be hideous and repulsive, a horror to behold.

This should give pause to those whose chief thought on earth is to pamper and decorate their bodies. This life will last only a few decades; but in the resurrection there will be an eternity. Should we prefer to be painted and "beautiful" for these few decades, and become an object of aversion for all eternity; or pay less attention to our body here on earth, so as to attain glory forever?

2. The risen bodies of the wicked, united to their souls, will remain condemned in hell forever, their companions other wicked souls, and devils, followers of Satan.

And in hell, the body, as well as the soul, will suffer torments such as we here on earth cannot even imagine. What will it profit those lost souls then, that here they had luxuries and pleasures?



The General Judgment will take place at the end of the world. It is a public repetition of the particular judgment. Then all that each has thought, said, done, or omitted will be known to everybody. The

just will receive their reward, and the wicked will be punished. At the General Judgment Jesus Christ will be the Judge. Then complete justice will be meted out to all, to the souls united with the bodies.

81. General Judgment

(Seventh and Twelfth Articles of the Apostles' Creed.)

What is the judgment called which will be passed on all men immediately after the general resurrection?—The judgment which will be passed on all men immediately after the general resurrection is called the general judgment.

1. The Last or General Judgment will take place *at the end of the world*, but when that will be, no man knows.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). After the Ascension angels told the Apostles that Christ will come again as Judge: "This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way, as you have seen him going up to heaven" (Acts 1:11).

2. Our Lord *predicted* that signs will precede the Last Judgment, which He Himself described; He will be the Judge.

(a) The Gospel will be preached in the whole world.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a witness to all nations; and then will come the end" (Matt. 24:14).

(b) There will be a great *apostasy* from faith; people will lose themselves in evil.

"Yet when the Son of Man comes, will he find, do you think, faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). "And as it came to pass in the days of Noe, even so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noe entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. In the same wise will it be on the day that the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-27, 30).

(c) *Antichrist* will appear and work false miracles.

St. Paul speaks of "the man of sin . . . the son of perdition, who opposes and is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sits in the temple of God, and gives himself out as if he were God" (2 Thes. 2:4).

What will take place on the last day?—On the last day these events will take place:

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1. The earth and the heavens will show *signs*; the stars will fall. In the heavens the sign of the Son of Man will appear. It is believed that this sign is the Cross.

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven. . . . And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (Matt. 24:29).

2. *Jesus Christ*, in great power and majesty, accompanied by the angels, will come in the clouds of heaven.

"For as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines even to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. . . . And they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty" (Matt. 24:27, 30).

3. The trumpet will sound, and all the dead will spring to life in a moment; they will be instantly *reunited to their souls*, and come to judgment.

"Behold, I come quickly . . . to render to each one according to his works" (Apoc. 22:12). "And he will send forth his angels with a trumpet and a great sound, and they will gather his elect from the four winds" (Matt. 24:31).

4. From these statements we are not to conclude that everybody will perceive the divine *essence* at the day of judgment. This cannot happen without completeness of joy; and the wicked can never see God.

The lost souls will "see God" behind some kind of veil so that they do not delight in His divinity; they will have some kind of perception of His Majesty, and recognize His justice.

If every one is judged immediately after death, why will there be a general judgment?—Although every one is judged immediately after death, it is fitting that there be a general judgment, in order that the justice, wisdom, and mercy of God may be glorified in the presence of all.

1. The last or General Judgment will be a *public repetition* of the particular judgment. The Judge and the matters taken up will be identical. Then Jesus will bring to light "the hidden things of darkness."

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. And another scroll was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the scrolls" (Apoc. 20:12).

2. All men and all angels, good and bad, will be *present to hear* the judgment of each one. "For there is nothing hidden that will not be made manifest, nor anything concealed that will not be known" (Luke 8:17).

Then will the unjust say these words, as they consider the just: "These are they whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints. . . . What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away" (Wis. 5:3-9).

3. Our Lord will place the good on His *right* hand, and the wicked on His *left*. To the *just* Christ will say: "Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). To the *wicked* He will say: "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire" (Matt. 25:41).

A great fear and instant realization of their sentence will fall upon the wicked. And they will say to the mountains and the rocks: "Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of him who sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Apoc. 6:16). Immediately the good will go body and soul to heaven, and the wicked will fall body and soul into *hell*. "And these will go into everlasting punishment, but the just into everlasting life" (Matt. 25:46).

4. The General Judgment is necessary in order:

(a) To *vindicate* God's providence in the government of the world, and to disclose both the good and the evil that men have done, in order to reveal God's justice, wisdom, and mercy. Man is a social, as well as an individual being; hence the necessity for a general, as well as a particular judgment.

On that day will men see how often God has granted them graces, and they have rejected them, how often God has turned even their evil acts to their advantage, that they might repent! Then will men see how much that took up time and thought on earth was folly in the eyes of God, and how what the world called nonsense and mocked was really heavenly wisdom. As St. Paul says: "We, for our part, preach a crucified Christ—to the Jews indeed a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23).

(b) To give the just the *public honor* due them, and the wicked the public shame they deserve, and to make the body share in the reward or punishment of the soul with which it shared good or evil on earth.

At the Last Judgment all our thoughts, words, and deeds, public and secret, will be made known to all creation. This fact should urge us to avoid everything of which we should then be ashamed made public. When we are tempted let us remember that the "hidden things of darkness" will be revealed on the last day.



The wicked in hell suffer dreadful torments. They feel despair, remorse, envy, and hopelessness, because they know that they can never obtain the one thing necessary for happiness. They can never see and enjoy God. They are tortured with envy

of the blessed in heaven. They are tormented with shame because their sins will be known to all entirely and completely. After the general judgment their bodies will share the pains of their souls. They will be in torments for all eternity.

82. The Torments of Hell

Who are punished in hell?—Those are punished in hell who die in mortal sin; they are deprived of the vision of God and suffer dreadful torments, especially that of fire, for all eternity.

1. *Christ Himself*, in fifteen places in Holy Scripture, refers to the punishment of hell, the horrible abode of the wicked.

Scripture calls hell "a place of torments," "an unquenchable fire," "everlasting fire," "the bottomless pit," "everlasting punishment," "outer darkness."

2. All who die in mortal sin, even with only a *single unrepented and unforgiven mortal sin*, are sent to hell.

God is continually calling sinners to repentance by numberless graces. He instituted a Church to teach them the way to heaven, to show them what to avoid. He instituted the sacrament of penance to cleanse from all sin, to assure the sinner that without any doubt God forgives him. He stands as the loving Father, awaiting with anxiety the return of the prodigal. If after all these graces the

sinner persists in sin, he has only himself to blame when he is sent to hell.

3. God does not wish to send anyone to hell. His only desire would be to have all His children with Him in the bliss of heaven. The sinner *forces* God to punish him in hell, by defying Him and refusing to recognize His authority. When a vile creature defies his infinite Creator, no punishment is too great.

Not one single sinner is sent to hell except by *his own fault*. No one is sent to hell unless he has wilfully, deliberately, and knowingly refused to obey the commands of God. We can truly say that the fetters of hell are of man's own fashioning. If a man is given a bright light, and he purposely blows it out, can he blame anyone else for the dark?

What pains will the condemned suffer in hell?—The condemned in hell will suffer the pain of loss and the pain of sense.

But no one can ever describe or understand adequately the torments of hell, just as no one can realize the bliss of heaven.

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1. **The pain of loss.** The wicked in hell know what they rejected and lost: God. This pain will be the greatest torment of hell, for the human soul is made for God.

(a) They feel despair, remorse, envy, and hopelessness, because they know that they can never obtain the one thing needed for happiness: they can never see God.

The greater the value of what is lost, the greater is the pain of loss. But the sinners in hell have lost God, of infinite worth. Their pain of loss must be in proportion.

(b) Instead of God and the angels and saints, the sinners in hell have *devils and loathsome criminals* for eternal companions. Hell contains nothing good. St. Paul truly says: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

There is *no love* in hell. The damned hate God, hate each other, and hate themselves. St. Chrysostom says: "Insupportable is the fire of hell—who doth not know it?—and its torments are awful; but if one were to heap a thousand hell-fires one on the other it would be as nothing compared with the punishment of being excluded from the blessed glory of heaven, of being hated by Christ, and of being compelled to hear Him say, "I know you not!"

2. **The pain of sense.** The wicked will suffer from fire and the torments inflicted on all the senses, the sight, the hearing, the smell, the taste, the touch. After the resurrection, the bodies of the damned will suffer with their souls. In this life sinners sin by their senses. In the same way they will be punished in hell. "By what things a man sinneth, by the same he also is tormented."

Christ calls hell an "unquenchable fire". The sensation of burning is the greatest pain man can conceive of. If one cannot stand for a brief instant putting his finger in the flame of a candle, how can he endure the fire of hell?

Christ calls hell "the outer darkness"; it is fire that gives no light, because in hell the damned never see God, the source of eternal light. Hell is the place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth", where the "worm never dies".

3. The punishment in hell is *not the same* for all. Each sinner will be punished according to the measure of his offenses.

Just as in heaven the bliss and glory of the saints differ, so in hell the torments and pains of the wicked differ. God is just; He will not punish a man who has committed only one mortal sin in the same measure that He punishes one who has lived a long life of wickedness.

4. The pains of hell will last *for all eternity*. If the punishment of hell were temporary, many sinners might prefer to gratify their passions on earth, no matter at what cost and penalty in hell, if it were to have an end. The fear of hell should urge us to lead a good life. *Nothing on earth is worth one moment in hell; and do we choose to suffer it for all eternity?*

Just as the bliss of heaven will last for all eternity, so will the pains of hell; and on and on and on, without end, forever. "And the smoke of their torments goes up for ever and ever; and they rest neither day nor night" (Apoc. 14:11). Christ Himself said: "And if thy hand or thy foot is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off and cast it from thee! It is better for thee to enter life maimed or lame, than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire" (Matt. 18:8).

Why did a good God create such a fearful place as hell?—A good God created such a fearful place as hell, because He is just, and must punish the sinner.

1. The sinner is a traitor to God Who created him.

God created this world and all creatures. He owns them. They must therefore be absolutely obedient to His will. If a creature revolts and defies God, then he must be treated as an *enemy*.

2. It is the opinion of Doctors of the Church that no one in hell is punished as much as he deserves. God sent us His own beloved Son, to suffer incredible agonies and death, so that we may be saved from eternal damnation. Can such a God be anything but merciful?

We know the mercy of God. We know how glad He is to receive back the repentant sinner. We therefore know that He will not punish too severely, that whatever punishment He metes out will be just.

3. We should have *no fear* of hell if we do our duty. **God will not send us to hell, unless we force Him.**

Let us remember that our Judge will be Jesus Christ, Who so loved us that He died on the cross for us. He is more eager to pass a favorable sentence on us than we are to receive it. We should have *confidence* in Him, as little children. "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56). The Lord "is long-suffering, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Let us remember always to plead with God for our souls. We can refuse God, but God can never refuse us: on this account salvation is in our hands.



Words can never give any idea of the bliss of heaven, where the good will continually enjoy God, and be in the company of the saints and angels. Of heaven David speaks: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house, and thou shalt make

them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure" (Ps. 35:9). St. John says of the blessed: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more" (Apoc. 21:4).

83. Life Everlasting: Heaven

What do we mean by "life everlasting"?—By "life everlasting" we mean that there will be another existence after this present life, and in it the just will be happy for all eternity.

In that life the just will dwell in heaven with God, in *perfect and everlasting happiness*. Heaven is both a place and a state: Our Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven, and ascended into it. Heaven is a *state*: even when the Blessed Virgin Mary, for example, appears to men, she does not leave heaven, which she carries with her, in the state of her soul.

This is why the good and holy have a foretaste of heaven even here on earth, in the peace and joy they possess in their hearts. "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,—Behold the dwelling of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Apoc. 21:2-3).

Who are rewarded in heaven?—Those are rewarded in heaven who die in the state of grace and have been purified in purgatory, if necessary, from all venial sin and all debt of temporal punishment; they see God face to face, and share forever in His glory and happiness.

We do not obtain heaven without working for it. He that for God's sake has suffered most and given up most will get the greatest reward in heaven. "He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting" (John 12:25). As St. Paul says: "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21).

1. The greatest joy of heaven is the **Beatific Vision**. This is the sight of God face to face. This vision is called *beatific*, because it completely fills with joy those who possess it. They know and love God to their utmost capacity, and are known and loved by God in return. The Beatific Vision

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will *satisfy completely and supremely* all our desires. Having God, we shall never wish for anything else. "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one 'day'" (2 Peter 3:8).

On earth, even when we obtain the dearest desires of our heart, we can never be completely happy. "We see now through a mirror in an obscure manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I have been known" (1 Cor. 13:12). In heaven, "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure" (Ps. 35:9).

2. The other joys and perfections of heaven will be numberless and of infinite variety. There will be neither sin, nor death, nor sorrow, nothing to cause trouble or affliction, *nothing to mar* the eternal bliss.

"They shall neither hunger nor thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike them nor any heat . . . and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Apoc. 7:16-17).

3. Our *companions* will be the most Holy Virgin Mary, the Angels and the Saints. We shall be reunited with those we have loved on earth, and we shall love them there more intensely. There will be *no more separation*. Whatever we have desired to know here on earth, we shall *learn* in heaven. All the *mysteries* of faith and science will be revealed. After the resurrection, we shall have our *bodily senses* in heaven, and by them relish joys unending.

Holy Scripture says of heaven: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

4. This bliss will last *for all eternity*. The joys of heaven will always delight. And we shall have no fear of their ending, for heaven will be everlasting. Eternity has *no measure*. It is like a circle: We can spend our whole life going around a circle, but we shall never find an end. Each part is only the beginning.

Eternity has *no end*. We can never have a proper conception of its duration, because we have nothing similar to eternity. Millions of ages are as nothing compared to eternity. If a bird were to carry away from the ocean one drop of water every thousand years, a time will come when it will have carried away the whole ocean. But that time is less than the shortest moment, if compared to eternity.

5. The reward and bliss of heaven will not be the same for all.

(a) The heavenly reward is given according to the goodness of the life each led on earth. In the same measure as we have loved God, He will reward us. However, each will be completely and supremely happy, because each will receive according to the *fulness of his capacity*. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another of the stars" (1 Cor. 15:41).

In a similar way, if we fill a small glass and a great glass full to overflowing with water, one contains more than the other, yet neither can receive one more drop. Martyrs, Virgins, Doctors, that is, teachers of truth and religion, are promised a special joy and glory in heaven.

(b) In the same way *bodies*, after joining the souls at the resurrection, will differ in brilliancy and beauty as star differs from star in glory. But all will be perfect, without defect or blemish.

Yet among the blessed there will be no envy. As St. Francis of Sales said: two children receive from their father each a piece of cloth to make a garment. The smaller child will not envy his brother the bigger garment, but will be quite satisfied with the one that fits him.

(c) The degree of glory of the blessed in heaven can neither be added to nor diminished for all eternity. And yet there are what we might term incidental glories: as for example, on the feast days of the Saints, when special Masses and commemorations are held in their honor, or when more people pay veneration, etc.

"And night shall be no more, and they shall have no need of light of lamp, or light of sun, for the Lord God will shed light upon them; and they shall reign forever and ever" (Apoc. 22:5).

What is meant by the word "Amen", with which we end the Apostles' Creed?—By the word "Amen", with which we end the Apostles' Creed, is meant "So it is", or "So be it"; the word expresses our firm belief in all the doctrines that the Creed contains.

Our Lord often used the word "Amen", usually as a solemnly positive affirmation: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). "Amen, amen, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51).