



1ST SATURDAY DEVOTION NEWSLETTER

November 2013

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THE BURNING TRUTH ABOUT PURGATORY

Curtis Martin

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Of all the misunderstood Catholic teachings -- and there are a few of them - purgatory is often seen as the most embarrassing. Thousands of Catholics leave the Church every year. Their faith is questioned and their religious education doesn't rise to the challenge. You've probably heard these questions yourself: "Where in the Bible does it say you have to confess your sins to a priest?" "Where does it say that the pope is infallible?" "That Mary was conceived without original sin?" And, "Where in the world did you Catholics get the teaching on purgatory?"

The typical conversation goes something like this:

- Non-Catholic: "So you're a Roman Catholic?"
- Roman Catholic: "That's right. I'm even a Notre Dame fan."
- NC: "Do you believe everything the Church teaches?"
- RC: "Well, yeah, I guess so."
- NC: "Even purgatory?"
- RC: "I think so."
- NC: "Well, let me get this straight. You believe in an all-loving God, don't you?"
- RC: "Yeah!"
- NC: "Do you believe that this God sent His only begotten Son to die for you?"
- RC: "Sure!"
- NC: "So let me get this straight: You believe in an all-loving God, who loved you so much that He sent His only begotten Son to die for you, just so you can go to heaven when you die. Yet, this loving God first sticks you in a 'cosmic oven' and bakes you for a couple hundred years or so until you're done?"
- RC: "Well, I've never really thought about it that way."
- NC: "Where in the Bible does it say 'purgatory'?"

About this time, our Catholic friend is looking for someplace to hide! He seems to have three equally unsatisfactory options. Option number one is blind faith: "I don't know why I believe it, but I'm going to keep right on believing it anyway. After all, I'm Catholic, so don't confuse me with the facts!"

Option two is an over-confident triumphalism: "Silly Fundamentalist! Where in the Bible really!"

The third option is to run for the hills.

Each of these options fails to take the situation seriously. Blind faith ignores the importance of an answer. Triumphalism ignores the importance of the question. And running away fails to see the importance of reality.

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OVERVIEW FOR THE MONTH

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The month of November is dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory, whose feast is celebrated on November 2. November falls during the liturgical season known as Ordinary Time and is represented by the liturgical color green.

During November, as in all of Ordinary Time (Time After Pentecost), the Liturgy signifies and expresses the regenerated life from the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is to be spent on the model of Christ's Life and under the direction of His Spirit. As we come

to the end of the Church year we are asked to consider the end times, our own as well as the world's. The culmination of the liturgical year is the Feast of Christ the King. "This feast asserts the supreme authority of Christ over human beings and their institutions Beyond it we see Advent dawning with its perspective of the Lord's coming in glory." — The Liturgy and Time, A.G. Mortimort ☐

FEASTS FOR NOVEMBER

The feasts on the General Roman Calendar celebrated during the month of November are:

- 1 All Saints, Solemnity
- 2 All Souls, Feast
- 4 Charles Borromeo, Memorial
- 9 Lateran Basilica, Feast
- 11 Martin of Tours; Veterans Day (USA), Memorial
- 12 Josaphat, Memorial
- 13 Frances Xavier Cabrini, Memorial
- 15 Albert the Great, Opt. Mem.
- 16 Margaret of Scotland; Gertrude, Opt. Mem.
- 18 Churches of Peter and Paul; Rose Philippine Duchesne (USA), Opt. Mem.
- 21 Presentation of Mary, Memorial
- 22 Cecilia, Memorial
- 23 Clement I; Columban; Bl. Miguel Agustín Pro (USA), Opt. Mem.
- 24 Christ the King, Solemnity
- 30 Andrew, Feast

The feasts of St. Martin de Porres (November 3), St. Leo the Great (November 10), and St. Elizabeth of Hungary (November 17) are superseded by the Sunday Liturgy. The feast of St. Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions (November 24) is superseded by the Solemnity of Christ the King. ☐

OUR CENACLE CORNER

Seeking a deeper relationship with God through meditation of passages from Holy Scriptures

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD SOULS, DO THEY NEED IT?

EXCERPTED FROM FR. J. PELLIRINO

The Book of Maccabees One and Two

During our lives we approach the Lord seeking the healing for the results of our sins. When our lives on earth have ended we depend on the prayers of those still living here to continue to ask God to heal the results of sin in our lives. The priest who said, "I don't just believe in purgatory, I am counting on it," is seeking healing from the community for the effects of his own sins.

This is the month of All Souls. We have done a disservice to our dead by canonizing them all, by deciding that no matter what their lives may have been like, they must be in heaven right now. It is a disservice because the faithful departed need our prayers. They need us to offer the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross for them -- to have Masses said for them. They need us to pray the rosary asking Mary to speak to her son for our loved ones. They need us to keep the memory of their goodness alive and before the Lord.

The Books of Maccabees tell us that it is a good thing to pray for the dead. During the Month of November, we pray for our loved ones that they might be healed of the effects of sin in their lives and be admitted into the eternal love of the Lord.

And so we pray in beautifully poetic language: Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

HIGHLIGHT OF THE MONTH

GIVING THANKS ALWAYS

By Adrian Rogers

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 5:20

I truly believe that this commandment, to thank God at all times for all things, is perhaps the hardest in all of the Bible to practice. But it is the secret to a happy and productive life.

WHEN SHOULD WE BE THANKFUL?

I want you to notice several things about this passage of Scripture. First, I want you to notice when we should be thankful. We are to give thanks always. If Paul had said sometimes, that wouldn't be so hard. But he clearly said always.

Now we're coming to Thanksgiving Day, but you and I both know that one day is not enough. Psalm 68:19 says, "Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loadeth us with benefits...." Every day you get a fresh load. You should never pray without thanking God.

Why should God give you anything else if you don't thank Him for what He's already given you? Many of us need to pull out some of the groans and shove in some hallelujahs into our prayers. If you don't already, begin putting some thank you's in your prayers.

FOR WHAT DO WE GIVE THANKS?

And what should we our thanks be for? For all things! Thank God for your faith, for your friends, for your food, and for the water you drink? You may ask, "Do I have to thank God for dirty dishes?" Well, a lot of people would like to have some dirty dishes; that would mean they had something to eat. But also, just be thankful for your fortune — the things that God has given you and done for you.

In church, a family heard of a couple giving a significant love offering in memory of their son who had died on the battlefield. On the way home, the wife asked her husband, "Why don't we give an offering of an equal amount for our son?" He said, "Why? Our son wasn't killed." She replied, "Don't you think that's a good reason to give an offering?"

HOW DO WE GIVE GOD THANKS?

But how? How is it possible to thank God always for all things? Beginning in verse

eighteen, Paul says it is possible because of three things. First of all, we are to give thanks in the Spirit. He says, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." You see, to be Spirit filled is to be thankful. If you're not thankful, you're not Spirit filled. In contrast, there is no way you can be Spirit filled and be unthankful. The mark of a Spirit filled life is gratefulness.

So give thanks in the Spirit, and verse twenty says to give thanks "unto God and the Father." James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Don't think negatively about God. God is good. He is your Father.

So, in the Spirit...unto the Father...and through the Son. Verse twenty also says to give thanks "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." You thank God in the name or with the authority of Christ. You don't have to understand all that God is doing. Even if you don't understand it, you can just say, "In the name of Jesus, I thank You."

Make it your daily habit, as I do, to lift your heart to God in praise as you get out of bed each morning. Just say, "Lord God, I love You, and I praise You." What a great way to start your day and to live your life!

FOUR LEVELS OF LIFE

In closing, I want you to think about something. There are basically four levels of life. The first is represented by people who are constantly complaining and grumbling. They brighten up a room just by leaving it.

The second includes people who just live lives of ingratitude. They don't complain, but they never thank God for His obvious blessings. That's a little better but not much.

Then, there are people who thank God for obvious blessings. When something good happens, they're grateful. That's a better level.

But let me tell you what the highest level is. It is to be grateful for all things at all times. Now folks when you get to that place, then you have learned the secret of joy. □

Dr. Adrian Rogers, preacher/teacher of Love Worth Finding Ministries, had a zeal and love for Jesus that resonated in every message. His legacy continues to reach around this world, sharing the good news that Jesus Christ is the greatest Love worth finding. Although Dr. Adrian Rogers passed away on November 15, 2005, tributes continue to pour in testifying of his worldwide impact.



MORE THAN MERELY APPRECIATING OUR BLESSINGS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO USE THEM IN A CORRECT WAY. THIS ONLY CAN TRULY DETERMINE AS TO HOW THANKFUL WE ARE!
YOUR 1ST SATURDAY NEWSLETTER STAFF

KNOWING OUR SAINTS

SAINT JOSAPHAT, ARCHBISHOP AND MARTYR 1584-1623

www.saintjosaphat.com

Born in 1584 in Vladimir, a city of ancient Poland, Saint Josaphat was the son of Gabriel Kuncewicz. His was a family of honorable Christians of the Greco-Slavic rite, in use among the Russians. His mother took care to raise him in the fear of God, and in his tender heart formed the first longings for virtue. He was never in any way lightheaded, but separated willingly from the games of his companions to pray. He made excellent progress in his studies, always preferring the sacred branches to the profane, and for thirty years he recited each day, without ever failing even once to do so, a large section of the Divine Office which he learned by heart.

At twenty years of age Josaphat deplored the situation of religion in Poland. In 1596, the Ruthenian Church was divided into two contending parties — the Unionates and those who persevered in schism. He saw divisions growing in the Church, and that few were remaining faithful to the Holy See, to safeguard the true orthodoxy and their eastern rites. He studied philosophy and theology under two famous Jesuits, and decided to enter religious life. When his employer, who was childless and wished to keep him, offered him his commerce as his adopted son, he declined that offer without hesitating, and entered the Convent of the Trinity at Vilna, where Basilian religious submissive to the Holy See were residing. He received the religious habit and was professed in 1604.

Saint Josaphat was ordained a priest and began to preach in various churches of the city, bringing back many dissidents to the Union. He was invited also to preach and govern in various regions of the land; he accepted to become head of a monastery at Bytene. He restored there celebrated sanctuaries, built a convent, and converted, among others, one of the most zealous of the dissidents. In 1614 Josaphat's friend Joseph Routski became Archbishop of the city of Vilna, and recalled his holy former companion to that city, confiding the monastery of the Trinity to him. Saint Josaphat never made harsh reproaches, but corrections warmed by a wholly paternal affection. The conversion of the separated brethren continued through the preaching of the one called by the Uniates The Scourge of the Schismatics, whereas the latter called him The Ravisher of Souls.

He became the Archbishop of Polotsk in 1617 at the age of thirty-eight, on the very day when, six years later, he would earn the consecration of blood, November 12th. He restored five major cathedrals and several lesser ones; he aided the poor, stripping himself often of the most necessary objects or funds. He maintained total frugality in his residence; he recovered certain properties retained

unjustly by powerful lords of the region, through his mildness of language in the lawcourts, to which he had recourse for that purpose. But he was soon to acquire, in a certain Melece Smotritski, a formidable enemy, who had himself consecrated, in Russia, Archbishop of the same city as Josaphat, with other aspirants to like authority. Despite the opposition of King Sigismund of Poland, who forbade all his subjects to have any communication with the usurper, the latter won adherents. The people of the city of Vitebsk, a little like those of Jerusalem, who in one week's time changed their hosanna's into tolle's, turned toward the newcomers in large numbers, and in an uprising succeeded in giving eighteen wounds to the head of the Archdeacon of the church, and leaving for dead another official, bathed in his blood.



When their Archbishop went there to calm the tumult in 1623, knowing well that his hour had come, in effect he was most cruelly assassinated and his body profaned; he was in his forty-fourth year. His mortal remains were recovered after five days from the waters of a river, and exposed for nine days, constantly emitting a fragrance of roses and lilies. A councillor of Polotsk, where the body was returned, abandoned the schism merely at the sight of the archbishop's beautiful countenance. Many of the parricides struck their breasts, and did likewise. The Archbishop had gone gladly to his death, offering his life that the schism might end; he had said as much beforehand. Four years after his death the author of the troubles, Smotritski, the false archbishop, after many combats made a decisive step and consecrated his life to penance, prayer and the defense of the Union. Such changes of heart are indeed the greatest of miracles, won by the sanctity of the true servants of God.

About five years after Saint Josaphat's martyrdom his body was found intact, though the clothing had rotted away. Again in 1637 it was still white and supple. A beautiful silver reliquary was made for it, with a life-size image of the reclining Saint surmounting it. The body was again exposed intact in 1767. It was eventually taken to the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. Pope Leo XIII canonized Saint Josaphat in 1867. □

GOD TOUCHED ME

SOULS IN PURGATORY -- WHAT BETTER GIFT CAN WE GIVE THEM THAN OUR PRAYERS TO HELP THEM REACH THEIR HEAVENLY DESTINATION

"It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

(2 Maccabees 12:46).

By: Denise Dizon-Gier, a devotee

We've all experienced death and loss in different ways. Since each and every one of us is a single person, each with our own unique personalities and life experiences, we all have our own ways of dealing with grief and processing it. In sharing my own personal thoughts and experiences, it is my hope that this will touch someone, in some way, that will in turn, save a life -- and even better, save a soul.

Earlier in the year, I came to a moment in my life where I was experiencing great loss. There was a sadness in my heart, an emptiness in my soul. I was feeling . . . lost. I had been blessed with so many things in my life, but was still feeling lacking. I think I knew deep down inside what was missing, but felt undeserving and guilty for not giving thanks to The One who blessed me with an incredible life. And unfortunately, as with all 'turning points' in one's life, it took a great crisis in order for me to "wake up."

To date, I've known 13 people that have passed away this year alone. They were either an immediate family member of a dear friend, a direct relative of mine, and even some dear friends of my own. Needless to say, I had been given a wake-up call on how truly precious life is. God touched my life in my time of need and I was reminded to truly appreciate the gift of life He has given to each and every one of us.

I then began to reflect on loved ones who have passed, with a now open heart, mind, and a renewed spirit. People had passed away for various reasons, but what of our dear friend Tony, who had passed away in June 2001?

It was a very difficult time for all of his friends and family when he first disappeared. We were all together just a few days before, many of us (including Tony) participating as groomsmen and bridesmaids at the wedding of our two dear friends. Tony was always the 'happy-go-lucky' guy with the constant smile and positive attitude, so it was hard to imagine what had happened to him. He was the kind of guy who would gladly give you the shirt off his back. When he was first reported as missing by his family, it was our hope that it was his independence and free spirit that perhaps motivated him to move on to another city or place to seek out new life experiences or different people. To our shock and disbelief, his remains were found months later, under a bridge, not far from where he was last seen.

The days to follow were even more alarming as we heard of talk that he was perhaps depressed and that there was evidence that he likely took his own life. It was even more distressing that his family did not want to have a funeral and that they did not want to disclose what was to become of his remains. Without any services to attend or cemetery to visit, what were we to do? We had just lost our dear friend -- but we had to respect his family's wishes even though we felt robbed of our own grieving process.

We all decided that we were to hold our own memorial in honor of him. Everyone that knew him attended, and we found at least some sort of comfort amongst ourselves. And as the months passed, sorrow would sometimes make way for anger. Why did he have to take his life? Why couldn't he just talk to any one of us?

As the years passed, the sadness was still there, but everyday life sometimes made you forget. I knew we all thought of him, said a prayer for him every now and then -- but is he at peace after all this time? I came to realize that time was being wasted wondering. Time was being wasted being sad. My recent spiritual awakening made me realize that it was time to take action. I first wrote the following "open letter" as a plea for prayer for him, with the intention of sending it to the circle friends closest to him. I wrote the letter with a heavy heart and when I finished it, came to realize that it had been sent out to everyone who knew him. (It was probably at the behest of my guardian angel, or maybe Tony's. Either way I am ever most grateful that through the grace of God, I listened.)

Hello all,

I wanted to take a moment and share something personal with each of you. It has taken so much (and too much) heartache, but I am finally coming to a turning point in my life. As some of you may (or may not) know, the past several months have been a bit of a struggle for me. So many people around me have experienced such tribulations, that it was only natural for me to look towards myself and figure out what was going on. There's been pain, suffering, and most especially – loss. Since the beginning of this year, nine of my friends & family have lost a loved one, to which I've attended six of those funerals.

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MEDITATION AND COMMENTARY

PASTRY SHOP CATHOLICS

By Stephen White
www.catholicvote.org



In his homily in Assisi today [October 4, 2013], on the Feast of St. Francis, the Holy Father made the following point:

Franciscan peace is not something saccharine. Hardly! That is not the real Saint Francis! Nor is it a kind of pantheistic harmony with forces of the cosmos... That is not Franciscan either; it is a notion some people have invented! The peace of Saint Francis is the peace of Christ, and it is found by those who "take up" their "yoke", namely, Christ's commandment: Love one another as I have loved you (cf. Jn 13:34; 15:12). This yoke cannot be borne with arrogance, presumption or pride, but only with meekness and humbleness of heart.

Later, to a gathering of bishops and poor people, he warned of "pastry shop Christianity" (cristiani di pasticceria) which forgets the Cross in the vain hope that all will be sweetness and light. The National Catholic Register reports:

"And if we want to be Christians, there is no other way," the Holy Father added. "We must undress ourselves today from a very serious danger that threatens each person in the Church: the danger of worldliness."

There are some who want to "make Christianity 'a little more human' without the cross," he said. But that is a kind of "bakery Christianity" in which everything is beautiful and sweet like a cake.

"That is not real Christianity," Pope Francis said.

True Christianity embraces the cross, because it is the way of Christ. He said, "Jesus himself said one can't serve two masters. Either serve God or serve money." □

THE BURNING TRUTH ABOUT PURGATORY

There is, however, another way: the way of constructive apologetics, which takes the question and the answer very seriously, and prayerfully begins to search the sacred texts and the storehouses of apostolic Tradition to find the truth about these important issues.

The case against purgatory seems to be based on three major objections. First, the teaching of purgatory seems to contradict the finished work of Christ and offend the basic understanding of God as a loving, all-caring, all-merciful God who has forgiven our sins in Christ Jesus. Second, purgatory seems to offer a "second chance" for those who did not follow Christ in this life. Third, purgatory does not appear to be a biblical teaching. Before examining the truth about purgatory, let's take a look at these objections and see why they should be taken seriously.

Scripture stresses the truth of God's love, and Evangelical Protestants have frequently had a powerful experience of Christ's forgiveness. St. John explains: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). Jesus Christ Himself stresses mercy over judgment, stating,

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:24).

Scripture teaches us about a God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). The Christian believer is called to accept the mercy of God as all-powerful, capable of overcoming all sin, and yet the Catholic who holds the teaching of purgatory seems to belittle God's forgiveness. From this perspective, God appears almost schizophrenic, wanting to forgive our sins and yet meticulously hold us accountable for them, at one time cleansing us from all unrighteousness (cf. 1 Jn. 1:9) and then later deciding to "fry us" for displeasing Him. Have we "passed out of judgment" (cf. Jn. 5:24) or haven't we? Has Christ forgiven our sins, or hasn't He?

The second objection against purgatory is that it is a manufactured second chance. If you don't really want to follow Christ, you can still get to heaven through the "backdoor." Yet Scripture is clear that spiritual mediocrity is unacceptable (cf. Rev. 3:15-16). Jesus calls for complete commitment. He is either Lord of all, or He isn't Lord at all. There is no second chance; we are either for Christ or against Him (cf. Lk. 11:23). The doctrine of purgatory seems to be an "end run." But Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6).

The third argument against the doctrine of purgatory flows from a main dogma of Protestant theology, sola

scriptura ("the Bible alone"). After all, where in the Bible do we find purgatory? A quick word check in any concordance will demonstrate that the word is nowhere to be found in Scripture. There's no discussion of some third place between heaven and hell. Surely something as important as purgatory would be clearly taught in the pages of Scripture!

Purgatory also appears to be "guilty by association": The doctrine is caught up in the "Catholic collection" of the intercession of the saints, indulgences, the sacrifice of the Mass, and other items that are perceived as "unbiblical" and the fruit of mere human tradition. As Christ warns, "[F]or the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God" (Mt. 15:6).

These views are held by very sincere Christians, men and women with whom we are united in Baptism. Catholics have an obligation to take these issues seriously.

When I began to investigate the teaching of purgatory, I knew that it wasn't enough to simply ask, "Where in the Bible is purgatory?" As a Christian, the two most fundamental truths that I held were the Trinity — three Persons in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and the Incarnation, that the eternal Son, at a point in history, took on human nature and became man like us in all things but sin. And yet the words "Trinity" and "Incarnation" were nowhere in Scripture. That is to say, the words weren't, but the teachings were.

I now needed to go to the Bible and examine whether the teaching of purgatory — whether the word was there or not — was to be found in the teachings of Christ and the apostles. I began to search the Gospels to see if Jesus gave any teachings concerning judgment or purification at the end of our earthly life. I began to see that several of Our Lord's teachings, far from disproving purgatory, seemed to point to the possibility that there might be some debt of justice that would be paid after our earthly life.

As Christ teaches about the importance of forgiveness, He gives the example of a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. He brought in a man who owed a great deal of money and forgave him the debt. The forgiven man in turn went out and met one of his fellow slaves, who owed him but a fraction of the amount, and demanded repayment. The just king summoned his slave back and said,

"You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt (Mt. 18:32-34).

What was Jesus talking about? Scripture clearly teaches, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). And yet Our Lord Himself gives the example of a man who had been forgiven,

afterward acted unjustly, and finally was handed over to repay all that he owed.

Again in St. Luke's Gospel, Our Lord challenges His followers to make peace with one another, so that they will not be handed over to the magistrate who would throw them into prison: "I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper" (Lk. 12:59; cf. Mt. 5:26). Christ calls the believer, who has passed out of condemnation — the sentence of hell — to live a life of justice which will be exacted to the last cent. If this is not the case, then the teachings of Jesus make no sense. The Catholic teaching about purgatory is that if, at the end of a Christian's earthly life, this debt of justice was not satisfied, he shall be purified in purgatory before entering heaven. The teachings of Christ did not seem to contradict this. But lack of contradiction is still a long way from proof.

In St. Matthew's Gospel there is a tremendous confrontation between Christ and the Pharisees, in which they accuse Him of exercising authority over demons by the power of Beelzebub, the "prince of demons" (Mt. 12:24). Jesus then warns them of the sin against the Holy Spirit and states,

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come (Mt. 12:31-32).

If this sin cannot be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come, some sins might be able to be forgiven in the age to come. Without using the word "purgatory," Jesus is presenting teachings that seemed in harmony with the Catholic teaching on purgatory and were a bit difficult to interpret from an Evangelical perspective. While I was far from ready to accept that Jesus was referring to purgatory, I was finding myself hard-pressed to come to any other conclusion. This "forgiveness of sins" and "the age to come," the reference to a prison in which we would not be released until we had "paid the last cent" — this is certainly not heaven or hell. We never get out of hell, and heaven is no prison.

I came across a passage in the New Testament that I found very surprising. While addressing the very issue of sin within the Christian community — those who were believers and had accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ into their lives — St. Paul writes:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble — each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the

foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

The passage is quite clear: Gold and silver, when placed into a furnace, would be purified; wood and hay would be burned away. As this is done, Scripture says we will suffer loss, but be saved "as through fire." The image of purgatory was becoming more vivid as I read. What else could St. Paul be referring to? He can't be referring to hell, because it's clear that the people who undergo this "purifying fire" will be saved, while those who are in hell are lost forever. And yet he can't be referring to heaven, because he mentions the suffering of loss, while in heaven every tear will be wiped away (cf. Rev. 21:4).

Scripture teaches that God is a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). The point St. Paul seems to make is that, as God draws us to Himself after death, there is a process of purification in the fire of God's holy presence. God Himself purifies us of those imperfect deeds: the wood, hay, and stubble. And those works that are performed in faithfulness and obedience to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, those of gold and silver, are purified. This purification is necessary because, as Scripture teaches of heaven — the new Jerusalem — and the temple within it, "Nothing unclean shall enter it" (Rev. 21:27). The biblical images of the purifying fire, through which the believer is saved while suffering loss, were now beginning to sound more and more like purgatory.

But where is the word "purgatory?" I began to see that this question revealed an ignorance on my part. The Scriptures were written in Hebrew and Greek. "Purgatory" comes from the Latin word *purgatorium*. In Scripture, we do find references to an afterlife that is neither the hell of the damned nor heaven. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *sheol* is used to describe this condition; in the New Testament, the Greek term is *hades*. I had always thought that *hades* was hell, but Scripture teaches very clearly that *hades* is not hell; it is distinct from *gehenna*, or the lake of fire which is the hell of the damned. In fact, the Book of Revelation describes how, at the end of time, death and *hades* are thrown into hell (*gehenna*). This is the second death, the lake of fire. Scripture teaches that at the end of time, there is no more death; and once the purification of all souls has taken place, there is no more need for *hades*. This same concept of *sheol* (in Hebrew), *hades* (in Greek), and *purgatorium* (in Latin) is purgatory as we have come to know it today (cf. Catechism, nos. 1030-32).

The major objection to purgatory is that somehow it undermines the finished work of Christ. Is Christ's death sufficient? Of course it is! It is sufficient to win our redemption and to allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, however, is the work of purification and sanctification. It is the application of the divine life won by Christ. Purgatory in no way should be viewed as a "second chance," by which

those who did not believe in and follow Christ can somehow “suffer their way into heaven,” despite their rejection of the Christian life. Jesus is clear that those who refuse to follow Him are guilty: “[H]e who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (Jn. 3:18). Spiritual purification is possible only for those who have been reconciled to God in this life (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

The concept of purification after death dates back to the Jews of pre-Christian times. Evidence of this can be seen in the Second Book of Maccabees. Catholics will quickly cite this as scriptural evidence for the reality of purgatory, but we must remember that Protestants do not accept 2 Maccabees as scriptural. Nevertheless, objective readers will have to note that, even if the seven books of the Old Testament accepted by Catholics and rejected by Protestants are not biblical, they are godly writings and worthy of our consideration. In 2 Maccabees, following a battle, the faithful Jews found out that their fallen comrades each carried with them sacred tokens of idols, which the law forbade the Jews to wear:

[T]hey turned to prayer, beseeching that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out. And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering (2 Mac. 12:42-43).

The sacred text notes that this was an honorable deed, and the passage closes with the statement, “Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Mac. 12:45).

What is striking about this passage is not what it asserts, but what it takes for granted. This episode is not told in an apologetic style, as if to prove that prayer for the dead was a pious act, but rather assumes it. Moreover, once the Catholic Church is accepted as the Church that Christ founded, and thus as the Church that defines the canon of Scripture, the teaching in Maccabees takes on greater weight as inspired Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).

What is clear and undeniable is the solidarity the early Christians felt with the deceased. Many ancient Christian monuments call out for prayer. For example, the epitaph of a bishop named Abercius, composed toward the end of the second century, provides: “Standing by, I, Abercius, ordered this to be inscribed; truly, I was in my seventy-second year. May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray for Abercius.” This practice of prayer for the deceased predates a fully developed defense of this practice, which was provided at the ecumenical councils of Lyons II (1274), Florence (1439-45), and Trent (1545-63).

As I began reading the Church Fathers, I was struck not only by the confidence of these holy men and the reality of the purifying fire (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15), but also by how

deeply the teaching was rooted in the apostolic Tradition. The historic evidence clearly pointed to a belief in a state of purification that would later be called “purgatory.” This term corresponded to the Hebrew concept of sheol, and to the Greek term hades in the New Testament. This third and temporary state of purification is biblical, apostolic, historical and, most of all, true and completely reconcilable with the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

The doctrine of purgatory is completely reconcilable with a loving God who is a consuming fire. As we are drawn up into His love, into His very divine life — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — we begin to burn with that same divine fire, and those impurities to which we have clung in this life must be burned away. This will inevitably involve suffering, as we let go of those imperfect things to which we are attached.

The hidden mystery behind the teaching of purgatory is our calling to live in God for all eternity, which requires us to give perfectly of ourselves (cf. Mt. 5:48). Even with deep faith, the Christian life is difficult. We are called to manifest heroic generosity, and yet generosity hurts in this life. No matter what we’re asked to give, we seem to run out — of time, of energy, of money. God calls us to acknowledge this weakness, this poverty, and to turn to Him and cry out for help that He might fill us with His grace.

In heaven, generosity will not hurt; the lack of generosity will hurt. That is because in heaven God will give Himself to us fully and completely, holding nothing back. Our ability to receive from Him will be completely contingent upon our ability, in turn, to immediately give back. Otherwise, the gift of God would destroy us. Like strapping a water balloon onto a fire hydrant nozzle, we would explode! It is only when we learn the habit of complete and total self-giving that we will be able to experience the joy of heaven.

Christians are called to accept the finished work of Jesus Christ, and to allow that work to be applied to our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit, so that those who are justified will be sanctified. For us it is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. □

Curtis Martin is the executive director of FOCUS. This article is a condensation of his chapter from Catholic for a Reason: Scripture and the Mystery of the Family of God.

GOD TOUCHED ME

I must admit, over time, I was slowly growing lazy with my faith. At one point in my life, I was a CCD teacher, so how could this be? But after getting married and having kids, and having schedules on top of one another, parties to go to and games to attend, God slowly began moving into the background. It wasn't that I was doing bad/evil things, I was just not showing the Lord that I was grateful for the many blessings I was given, and showing Him the adoration He deserves. I even remember telling the kids in one of the Catechism classes I was teaching, "I don't realize until after the fact, but whenever I miss church, I tend to have a stressful week." So why wasn't I following my own advice??

It has been a week since my Tita Tessie passed away -- almost a month since Rowena passed away, two and a half months since Tita Pat passed, five months for Tito Danny, and six months for Tita Gloria. I've been emotionally drained and when I think of you, my dear friends, I can't even begin to imagine how difficult it was and still is, to lose someone you love so much. Some of you had the pain of seeing your loved one suffer from a disease, while some of you lost someone without warning. It's just been a whirlwind of emotion and I begin to think I can't possibly cry anymore. But then during random moments in the day or week, I'll have a chance encounter with a fleeting memory of that person. One small trigger and suddenly my heart begins to feel a twinge of sadness—followed by that old familiar knot forming in my throat, and suddenly the tears begin streaming down my face continuously.

I finally had to make the conscious decision to NOT feel distraught anymore. It was time to finally stand up. It was time to finally replenish my soul spiritually.

I recently began attending Rowena's daily rosary novena. Slowly but surely, I began to feel a little bit more empowered. It was so wonderful to see a group of people pulling together with one common love for the purpose of one common goal. I finally had an epiphany -- instead of wasting time feeling sad for someone who has passed, why not be proactive and do something for them to ensure their souls are at peace?

*We all are familiar with **the power of prayer**. So now I am compelled to share with you something "special" that happened the other night during our novena. We all felt Rowena's presence while we were in the midst of our prayers. But we did not realize it until after we finished and began sharing our experience. When we finished, Tita Lou (her mom) broke down and started crying and thanking all of us for joining in praying for her. JJ always feels Rowena's presence, but Tita not as much and finally, that night she did and that's why she broke down. There was a slight scent in the air, part sweet, part floral. It was intermittent current of air,*

... I am your Mother Mary.

You come together and join in this prayer as one. Heart and spirit are joined for one purpose alone -- be with God your thoughts and words. Reconcile your actions with others. There are no words closer to God's heart than words of complete surrender to Him, the words of simplicity and humility.

Join me my children as I raise your presence before God. You cannot imagine how God accepts your words of prayers with sincerity especially in this collective prayer of His own Army in this part of physical realm. Be as one, be strong, be sincere in your relationship with God, my children.

I am always with you as you pray my beads of rosary in your daily offering.

*- Mary,
Your Lady of the Rosary*

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but then you could also feel a sudden warmth that would pass like a breeze.

Maybe some of you might think I'm crazy, but I know that when you believe -- you feel it, you know it in your heart. So now here comes the even crazier part: some people in the room also felt the presence of other spirits along with Rowena. I don't know who exactly, but my guess is it may be some people that have passed recently and/or perhaps some that have long passed. Either way, they are in need of our prayers, especially the souls that have no one to pray for them.

JJ and I have been talking and our dear friend, Tony, came up in the conversation. It's been approximately 12 years since his passing and for me personally, there has been an ebb and flow of wondering whether or not his soul is at peace. There have been times when I'm mindful of him and praying for his serenity and I feel hopeful. And then there are times when I forget and suddenly remember. I pray again, but feel worried and concerned I'm not doing enough. Fast forward now to present day 2013.

JJ and the group have been so kind to include my aunt's name along with Rowena's when we pray and offer the rosary. Pam has been feeling recently that her aunt's soul is not at peace (she passed away a few years ago). So, she too has been included in the offering. And I don't know if it's because JJ is "in tune" with Rowena's spirit, but he's been feeling that Tony is in need of prayers, so he too has now been included in our daily rosary.

The more I think about it, and the more I've been praying, the more I am troubled and worried for him. So I am asking you to please join in praying for our friend. Whatever level your faith may be, whatever time and prayers you can offer, big or small, **please, please, please pray for Tony.** If you pray a daily rosary, offer it for him. If you attend mass on Sundays, make a request/donation at your local church and offer a mass for him. Whatever you can do, it will help tremendously.

I myself will be praying a rosary for him every day until All Souls Day, which is on Saturday, November 2. For those of you who commute, there's an "audio rosary" app that's so easy to use! I just play it while I'm driving to work and following along. It only takes about 15, 20 minutes or so, and it calms you through the rush-hour traffic. Also, if you're interested, a Mass has been offered for him at St. Paul in Chino Hills for Sunday, October 27, 2013, at 11:00 AM. You are all more than welcome to attend. I will also let you know when there are more masses that will be offered for him.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. If you have any questions, comments, or thoughts, feel free to reply to all (or reply to me). You can also call me or text me. I hope you can all join me on this little mission.

I love you all and God bless,

D

The reaction to my open letter in the days following was so encouraging and uplifting. I was so glad to see that it had touched people and was motivating them to lead a more prayerful and spiritual life. Here is an example of one of the responses:

"What I always admired about Tony was his courage. When he wanted to do something, he did it! He had a lasting impact on me. Despite where I am and at any time of the day, I try to live life to the fullest and be a positive impact on the world around us. I know Tony would! Although my wedding day is a reminder of his death and I ponder on what he could have been feeling that weekend, I always remember the good times and conversations we had while he was alive and how grateful we are for him to be a part of that special day of our lives. It never gets easy knowing that we will never see those that have passed again, but we can carry on their legacy through our actions and the way we live our lives."

This is now how I choose to remember Tony -- not by his death, but by how he lived his life and the positive impact he made on all of us. He was the guy who rented a U-Haul tow truck and drove from Diamond Bar to Baker, CA, and back, in order to pick up a couple of stranded friends and their inoperative car. It is also my hope that our continued prayers will lead Tony's soul towards the direction of Our Lord. We pray not only for Tony, but for all departed souls. I hope that it is not too late for everyone to realize that our salvation and redemption lies within our Eternal Father. It's never too late to ask God for forgiveness and to truly understand and comprehend the ultimate sacrifice made through our Lord Jesus. How we live our lives is best summed up by Mother Mary's message:

"Always remember the life you have in this world is your actual offering before God's throne in the everlasting realm." □

Editor's Note: This group of prayer warriors have since then "officially founded" the 1st Friday Sacred Heart Devotional Group (Chino Hills), praying for the poor souls in purgatory, the sick and the dying, an hour or two every 1st Friday evening at Rowena's family home.

***If you have any personal articles
or God's miracle in your life
you want to share with the devotees,
we may be reached at
the following e-mail addresses
and phone numbers:
evelyn.pua@spiritualarmyofgod.org
alice.a@spiritualarmyofgod.org
(702) 274-4315 and/or (213) 385-7798***

SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT RECOMMENDED

- You are enjoined to practice Eucharistic Adoration at least an hour a week. Let us render God adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition. Kindly check with your respective parishes for schedules. Some churches are open 24-hours for Eucharistic Adoration.
- Pray at least one rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary daily.
- Pray the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy at 3:00 PM and at 9:00 PM daily.
- Pray the Angelus at 6:00 PM daily.
- Pray the Pro-Life Scriptural Rosary [www.rosaryoftheunborn.com] to make reparation for the crime of abortion.
- Think of ways to make reparation to Mary for the sins committed against Jesus and Mary. A very good one is to join the **First Saturday devotion**; another is the **2000 Hail Mary devotion**.
- Visiting a cemetery and praying for the dead during the Octave of All Saints' Day (November 1 through November 8) will gain a plenary indulgence that can be applied only to the souls in purgatory. On other days, this work gains a partial indulgence.
- Spend a little time after Mass thanking God for all the unnamed saints, some of whom could be our own relatives.
- Make a nice poster listing all the family and friends departed. Put this on display where the members of the family can be reminded to pray for the loved ones throughout November. Remind family members to offer extra prayers and sacrifices for the poor souls in purgatory. Of course this shouldn't be the only motivation, but do include the fact that after these souls reach heaven, they will intercede on your behalf.
- Invite someone to dinner who has no place to go for Thanksgiving.
- If you have no other commitments volunteer to help serve Thanksgiving dinner at a place which is serving the poor.

THANK YOU

... a small and simple phrase that comes from a grateful heart!

Psalm 106:2

FOR PRAYERS HEARD AND PETITIONS GRANTED

Every morning when I wake up, I thank you God, for another day of being alive, being able to see, hear, smell and touch, being able to walk, run and jump; and most of all, for being with my family, friends and loved ones. And every night before I go to bed, I thank you, God, for allowing me to have a wonderful day, in spite of all the trials and tribulations that have come my way.

- Fed

For another year of life and opportunity to love you and serve you, My Lord and My God, living my days as you have given me the license to live it!

- MB

As I wait on your perfect timing to grant my prayers and petitions, I thank you Lord for the grace to persevere in asking, knocking and seeking -- with great hope and trust in your plan for us!

- Alice A.

For all donors to the Spiritual Army's Toy Drive for the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles – a BIG THANK YOU!

- April K.

2000 HAIL MARY DEVOTION

The Spiritual Army of God the Father acknowledges with thanks our generous November sponsors of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion. We are grateful that we have merited their partnership and support in providing a venue of spirituality and fellowship for the devotees of our Blessed Mother. The devotion continues to be a constant success.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Rosalind Van Heel | Debbie Lorenzo

Los Angeles, California

Linda Cruz | Denise Gier

Ruth Mercado | Alice Ng

Cora Pablico | Florentina Ramones

Denise Gier & Ruth Mercado
Coordinators

SPIRITUAL ARMY NEWS DISPATCH

FIRST SATURDAY DEVOTION COMES TO ST. FRANCIS DE SALES ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The rosary group of St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church, in coordination with The Spiritual Army of God the Father, is now praying the Scriptural rosary to the Blessed Virgin Mary, every 1st Saturday of the month. The church is located on 1111 Michael Way, Las Vegas, NV 89108 at the corner of Washington Street and Michael Way.

Starting on October 5, 2013, the group has decided to do this every 1st Saturday of the month. Because of the time constraints due to baptisms, quinceanera, weddings and other church activities, the devotional prayer is limited to praying the Scriptural Joyful mysteries only. The group hopes that one day, it will be able to add more 1st Saturday devotional prayers to this.

The 1st Saturday Cenacle at 10:00 A.M. and devotional prayers at 1:00 P.M. at The Cenacle House at 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, Las Vegas, NV 89117 still continues. ☐

HOLIDAY SEASON GIFT GIVING IS UNDERWAY

The Spiritual Army of God the Father is currently planning for the holiday season's gift giving to those in need. We have asked for suggestions from the devotees and are exploring the different avenues of charitable opportunities not just during the holiday season but also during the rest of the year. Currently, we have the Toy Drive and the Support for a Seminarian. Our thoughts are built around the question "How do our homeless and poor neighbors celebrate the holidays?" Driven by this thought of loving our neighbors and the fervent desire to help people in dire need, we will surely be able to come up with lots of suggestions. As an act of Godliness, we strive to share our blessings, no matter how small it may be, with other people. These plans could not be made possible without each and every support from our devotees. ☐

ROWENA'S MISSION CONTINUES

What originally started as a group of family and friends praying for the healing of our dear departed devotee, Rowena Ramos, [from the time of her cancer prognosis and continuing even after her death] has now become the **1st Friday Sacred Heart Devotional Group for Departed Souls** in Chino Hills. The group is composed of young couples who have had an "awakening" as they witnessed Rowena's faith and trust in God's peace, love and mercy as she lived the last 14 months of her life. The group meets after work on 1st Fridays for an hour or two of prayers for the poor souls in purgatory [the sick and the dying, too]. As the parents pray, the children [ages two to nine] are holed-in either at the play room and/or the family room. And depending on how soon these kids' energy level wears down, some parents [usually Moms] come along for a party where they are served with plastic veggies, pizza, fruits and cookies – with make-believe steaming cup of tea!

For those of us now in our senior year(s) [and experiencing more and more senior moments each day], this younger group of devotees offers a refreshing hope, that our devotions will continue to live on – to their children and their children's children! ☐

UPCOMING EVENTS

**TOY DRIVE FOR THE
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
[ONGOING]**

**FEAST DAY OF
THE HOLY INFANT JESUS**
SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 2014
ST. CASIMIR CATHOLIC CHURCH
2718 ST GEORGE STREET
LOS ANGELES, CA 90027

SAVE THE DATE
AND SAVE UP FOR A
**PILGRIMAGE TO
MOTHER MARY'S
APPARITION SHRINES**
PORTUGAL | SPAIN | FRANCE
DECEMBER 4-21, 2014
DAILY ACTIVITIES AND OTHER
INFORMATION ARE AVAILABLE AT
WWW.SPIRITUALARMYOFGOD.ORG

\$400 GUARANTEES YOUR
RESERVATION AND YOU HAVE UNTIL
OCTOBER 3, 2014 TO PAY
PILGRIMAGE COST

DEVOTION SCHEDULE



THE SPIRITUAL ARMY OF GOD THE FATHER

cordially invites you to the following devotions:

IN LOS ANGELES:

1st Saturday Devotion

The Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | 501 N. Beaudry Avenue | (213) 250-7962
Holy Mass starts at 8:30 A.M. | 1st Saturday Devotional Prayers follow.

Devotion to God the Father

Every 1st Sunday of the Month

The Monastery of the Angels | 1977 Carmen Avenue on Gower | (323) 466-2186

11:20 A.M. - Rosary to the Father | 11:50 A.M. - Holy Mass

1:00 P.M. - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Confession ongoing from 11:20 A.M. to 11:45 P.M.

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – November 16, 2013

at the Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | starting at 8:30 a.m.

Please call Victor at (213) 385-7798 if you wish to become a Sponsor of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion.

IN LAS VEGAS:

1st Saturday Devotion

at The Cenacle House in The Enclave | 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, | Las Vegas, NV 89117 at 1:00 PM
Cenacle will be at 10:00 AM before the devotional prayers.

Please call Evelyn at (702) 274-4315 for entry to The Enclave or for more information.

Devotion to God the Father

Every 1st Sunday of the month from 2:00 to 3:30 P.M.

at The Cenacle House in The Enclave | 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, | Las Vegas, NV 89117

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – November 9, 2013

Please call (702) 255-9616 or (702) 274-4315 for

dates and venues for the coming months or for more information or if you wish to Sponsor the Devotion.

IN LAUGHLIN, NEVADA:

1st Saturday Devotion

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church | 3055 El Mirage Way

Holy Mass starts at 8:00 A.M. Devotional prayers follow.

IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:

1st Saturday Devotion

2000 Hail Mary Devotion

Please call (650) 766-2071 for dates and venues for the coming months or for more information.

For Sacramento:

Please call Precy Rieta (916) 564-3733 | Caring Sturgill (916) 897-3194 | Maria Rosario (916) 230-7756.

IN SAN DIEGO

Rosary to the Father

Monday – Saturday after the 8:00 A.M. Mass [Look for Iris Haj]

St. Mary's Church | 1160 S. Broadway | Escondido, CA 92025

IN THE PHILIPPINES

2000 Hail Mary Devotion - Metro Manila Area

Letty Rollan has organized the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion in various areas of Metro Manila through the members of the "Mother Butler." Please call her U.S. Vonage phone (510) 779-6652, text her at Manila #916-384-9300, and/or call her Manila landline 939-4677. Mention Mila Lumba's name to be recognized.