

Purgatory Exists. It Burns but Its Fire Is an Interior One!

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19-31), Jesus admonishes us through the image of a soul destroyed by arrogance and opulence, who has created an impassable chasm between himself and the poor man; the chasm of being trapped within material pleasures; the chasm of forgetting the other, of incapacity to love, which then becomes a burning and unquenchable thirst. We must note that in this parable Jesus is not referring to the final destiny after the Last Judgement, but is taking up a notion found, *inter alia*, in early Judaism, namely that of an intermediate state between death and resurrection, a state in which the final sentence is yet to be pronounced.

This early Jewish idea of an intermediate state includes the view that these souls are not simply in a sort of temporary custody but, as the parable of the rich man illustrates, are already being punished or are experiencing a provisional form of bliss. There is also the idea that this state can involve purification and healing which mature the soul for communion with God. The early Church took up these concepts, and in the Western Church they gradually developed into the doctrine of Purgatory. ... (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, #'s 44-45.)

With death the choices one made in life are final and come to judgement. There will be some whose lives were so filled with hate and suppression of love that they are beyond remedy; their state is irrevocable, and this is what we mean by hell. There will be some whose lives were permeated with love for God and others, effecting a high level of union with God that ends their journey at death in immediate bliss. Others will fall in the intermediate state between death and resurrection called purgatory, where the soul is purified from every defilement and falsehood that has stained the soul but was unable to extinguish the desire for Truth and Purity, the hunger for God. Pope Benedict speaks of the fire that will test our works. If they survive the fire, we 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 3:12-15). In this text, it is in any case evident that our salvation can take different forms, that some of what is built may be burned down, that in order to be saved we personally have to pass through "fire" so as to become fully open to receiving God and able to take our place at the table of the eternal marriage-feast. (*Spe Salvi*, #46.)

Recent theologians believe the "fire" that both burns and saves is Christ Himself, our Judge and Savior, and that this encounter with one's most intimate self and Christ, the living God, is the decisive act of judgement, the moment when all the impurity of our lives is laid bare. In the pain of this encounter is salvation, for it transforms us "as through fire" and makes clear the relationship between justice and grace. Our defilement does not stain us forever if we have continued to reach out towards Christ and His Truth.

At the moment of judgement, we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy. It is clear that we cannot calculate the "duration" of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world. The transforming "moment" of this encounter eludes earthly time-reckoning—it is the heart's time, it is the time of "passage" to communion with God in the Body of Christ. ... The incarnation of God in Christ has

so closely linked the two together—judgement and grace—that justice is firmly established: we all work out our salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). Nevertheless grace allows us all to hope, and to go trustfully to meet the Judge whom we know as our “advocate”, or *parakletos* (cf. 1 Jn 2:1). (Spe Salvi, #47.)

Early Jewish thought also included the idea that we can help the deceased in this intermediate state. In 2 Maccabees 12:38-46, Judas Maccabee ordered sacrifices to be offered in the Temple in Jerusalem for slain Jewish soldiers who had worn pagan amulets (good-luck charms). We see in Christianity throughout the ages that same belief that love can reach into the afterlife, and that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible even there, for no one lives alone, no one sins alone, and no one is saved alone. Hence, our practice of offering the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving on behalf of the dead.

On the eve of February 11, 1958, Our Lady of America spoke these words to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil and they give us cause to ponder.

“My child, nothing is accomplished without pain. Prepare to suffer much. You see the sword in the Heart of your Mother. Suffering completed the work of divine grace in my soul. He who refuses to suffer will never abide in the Spirit of Christ, will never be formed into His image.” [In January of 1957, Our Lady begged us: “Help me save those who will not save themselves.” (Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Pgs. 23, and 15.)

On August 22, 1957, feast of the Immaculate Heart, Our Lady said: “I wish to gather about me, my tender child, soldier and valiant bearer of the torch, an army of brave lovers, who as my torchbearers will enkindle the fire of Divine Love in the souls of men. Only those who are strong in love can become my soldiers to bear aloft, not the sword of destruction, but the sword of fire, the flaming torch of Divine Charity.” (The Diary, Pg. 19.)

If we heed Our Lady’s call to be brave lovers, imagine how much blessing we would obtain for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, for all sinners, with so little effort! Our Lord told St. Gertrude the Great that the following prayer would release 1,000 souls from purgatory each time it is said.

“Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Most Precious Blood of Thy Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the Universal Church, for those in my own home and within my family. Amen.”

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in honor of the Holy Souls in Purgatory.
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