

PURGATORY AND PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD.

(Abridged from Cardinal Wiseman.) The Catholic doctrine of purgatory is often held up to public odium, but it is difficult to see what there is in it to make it so apt and popular a handle for abuse.

It is, then, in order that both God's justice may be secured of its rights, and His mercy not hindered of its ends, that not only our lesser offences, but also our failure to make due satisfaction for our greater ones, shall be punished in the place or state called purgatory.

There can be such a thing as a middle state of souls now, in fact, that these actually were one before our Lord's ascension, the Limbo of the just men and women of ancient times. It was the place of detention visited by our Saviour and spoken of by St. Peter (I. St. Peter, iii. 19): "In which He also coming preached to those spirits who were in prison."

To examine fully the proofs of this doctrine, it is necessary to connect it with the Catholic practice of praying for the dead. For this practice is essentially based on the belief in purgatory. Why does the Catholic pray for his departed friend, but that he fears lest, not having died in so pure a state as to be immediately admitted to the sight of God, he may be enduring the punishment which God has awarded after the forgiveness of his trespasses of his brethren, he may be released from that painful condition.

When, for instance, God forgives the sin of David in the prophet Nathan (II. Kings xii. 14), the divine avenger does not say, "The Lord hath pardoned you: arise you have no further cause of sorrow: you are fully justified before God." But he tells him that he must still atone for his crime: "Because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing the child that is born to thee shall surely die."

St. Paul's prayer to God for Onesiphorus (II. Tim. i. 16-18, 19) is, according to the judgment of the wisest commentators, a petition for one who had departed this life. St. Ambrose, a glorious leader of Christ's Church in early days, comments on a remarkable passage of St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians (iii. 15): "If any man's work shall be saved, yet so as by fire, it shall be saved, yet so as by fire, it shall be saved without pain."

repentance to try to satisfy this divine justice, by the voluntary assumption of such penitential works as His revealed truth assures us have efficacy with Him.

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St. Paul, when he declares to the Colossians (Coloss. i. 24): "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and in the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body which is the Church?" What else does this teach but that much is to be done by man, in his flesh and by suffering, towards applying Christ's sufferings to the soul's welfare?

ing, and another to receive at once the reward of faith and virtue; one thing to be purged of sin by long suffering and by fire, another to cleanse away all sin by martyrdom. The cleansing of sin by fire indicates purgatory, whence no one can go forth until he pays the very last mite.

We might quote a multitude of passages from the Fathers of the Church, the most ancient, such as Tertullian and Origen, as well as those of later times like the ones already offered. And, in addition, there is not a single ancient liturgy of the Christian Church in existence in which this doctrine is not laid down. In fact, if one believes in the Holy Ghost dwelling among the children of God, there can be no hesitation in accepting the universality of the doctrine, in purgatory and in the efficacy of prayers for the dead.

Nor is there any force in the objection that the word purgatory is not found in Scripture. Where is the word Incarnation to be found in Scripture? Where are many other terms, held most sacred in the Christian religion? The doctrines are found there; that is enough; the names were not given till circumstances rendered it necessary.

As a practical doctrine in the Catholic Church, purgatory and prayers for the departed have a most consoling influence, and one worthy of a religion that came down from heaven to second all the feelings of the human heart. Nature herself revolts at the idea that the tenderest bonds of love can be rudely snapped asunder by the hand of death—conquered and deprived of its sting by the victory of the cross. The true Christian spirit will not be separated from one it loves in death, and the stroke of the grave itself is the delusion that sympathy is at an end, that the union of prayer is to be broken at the moment of death; that no further interchange of friendly offices may take place between those who have laid them down to sleep in peace, and us, who, for awhile, strew fading flowers upon their tombs. But sweet is the consolation to the dying man, who, conscious of many imperfections, knows that if his own time of merit is ended by death, others will lovingly intercede in his behalf; soothing to the afflicted survivors is the thought that instead of unavailing tokens of affection in prayer and supplication, this sentiment will often in the first moments of grief overpower religious prejudice, cast the unbeliever down on his knees beside the remains of his friend, and snatch from him an unbidden prayer for his eternal rest; it is an impulse of bereaved nature seizing at once upon this consolation, which we once upon this consolation, which we have seen to be rooted in our best human instincts. But this is only like the fitting and melancholy light which sometimes plays for a moment over the corpses of the dead; while the Catholic belief and practice is a steady lamp of hope shed by the unflinching affections.

It prolongs the tenderest affections beyond the grave. It continually renews the faith in trust that the assistance we on earth can afford to our departed suffering brethren, will beamply repaid when they have reached their place of rest.—Catholic Truth Society Pamphlet.

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Mother

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