

PASTORAL LETTER

Of His Grace L. P. A. Langevin,
O. M. I.

Canonically Instituting in His Diocese the Pious Association of Union of Prayers for the Departed.

Archbishopric of St. Boniface,
2 February, 1903.

Louis Philippe-Adelard Langevin by the Grace of God and Favor of Apostolic See, Archbishop of St. Boniface.

To the Regular and Secular Clergy, to the Religious Communities, and to all the faithful of our Diocese, health and benediction in the Lord.

To Our Well Beloved Brethren,—

The Church of Jesus-Christ, which cannot err, since her Divine Master, has promised to remain with her and to teach her all truth until the consummation of the world, reminds us, by the Holy Council of Trent, Sess. VI. C. 31, that sinful man must suffer temporal pain in this life, or in the life to come, in order to obtain full remission of his sins, before entering into the kingdom of Heaven, she declares in Sess. XXII. that Purgatory exists and that the souls detained there are helped by the suffrages of the faithful; above all, by the precious sacrifice of the mass; bishops are commanded to preach this holy doctrine transmitted to them by the Fathers and Councils of the Church.

It is in order to obey this grave and wise injunction that we come, dearly beloved brethren, to speak to you on devotion to the Holy Souls of Purgatory.

Belief in expiation after death has always existed in humanity, even among pagans and that ancient philosopher who has been called the Divine Plato teaches that those who have been guilty of curable offences suffer after death pains proportioned to their faults, until purified from their sins, they are judged worthy to receive recompense for the good actions they have done.—Gorgias, 171.

The views of the Pagans of old, and of those of our Indians who are still plunged in idolatry, touching the migration and laborious journeys of souls after death, the offerings of food and materials for hunting and fishing, deposited still in our day, on these pagan tombs, alongside our lakes and rivers, are they not so many proofs of the unshaken belief of humanity in a state of expiation after death? Can this constant and universal belief be falsehood and error? The Jews believed in Purgatory, and we have a striking proof of this in the fact that Judas Machabeus sent to the temple at Jerusalem, a sum of money destined for the offering of sacrifices, to expiate the sins of the soldiers who had fallen in battle, and who had concealed objects of superstition underneath their garments. Holy writ clearly affirms this belief in these words: "For it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins."—2 Mach. XII. 23-46.

Also when our Lord spoke of sins which might be forgiven in the other world and of the prisons, where one may not be delivered, until the last farthing of his debt be paid, he evidently made allusion to a place of expiation in the next world, and the Jews well understood this.

It is in vain, says St. Augustine in the "City of God" Bk. XXI. C. 24, that Jesus Christ has spoken to them of sins, which could not be forgiven either in this world or in the next, if there were no sins in the next, remission is received not in this life but the life to come.

"Why should Our Lord have spoken this," cries out St. Bernard, "if there is no remission in the other world by cleansing from sin?"—Serm. LVI. in Canticum No. 11.

St. Cyprian speaks of a long purgation by fire after death (Lib. 4, Epist. 2). Also St. John Chrysostom exclaims with reason: "It is not with tears, but with prayers, with supplications, with alms, with offerings, that we help the dead. Let us not weary of helping them by our prayers," and in his third

homily on the Epistle to the Philipians, the same holy doctor speaks of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the dead and calls to mind apostolic authority. "It is not in vain," says he, "that the Apostles themselves decreed to make commemoration of the dead during the redoubtable mysteries, because they knew the departed drew thence profit and immense advantage."

But hear, dearly beloved Brethren, how the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, explains the doctrine of the Church, in regard to the state of the souls after death: "Enlightened by the judgment of God on her merits and demerits, the soul, says he, goes away of herself to the place of her eternity, like those light or heavy bodies which mount or descend to that place, where their moving should terminate. Nothing stops the soul which is crushed under the weight of sin, fixed by impenitence; it falls heavily into the abyss of eternal suffering; but the penitent soul to whom God has shown heaven, and who feels herself drawn towards the region of eternal happiness may not be sufficiently pure to bear the sight of Him, who suffers nothing impure in His presence. Hence the necessity of a middle state where grace is obliged to await glory and to continue in pain the purification that repentance has not had time to finish on earth. This middle state the Church calls Purgatory."

The authority of Sacred Scripture and the testimony of the Fathers establish this truth so well that to deny it would be heresy.—Sum. Theo., Supp. quaes. 69, a. 2.

You see, dearly beloved brethren, there is nothing better proved than the dogma of Purgatory, and if the Church has defined nothing on the nature of the pains that souls suffer therein, and on the place itself of their expiation, she teaches, however, that these souls suffer very much, not only on account of the temporal pain due to sins that have not been satisfied for in this world, but also on account of the cruel privation of the sight of God.

St. Augustine declares that the mysterious fire of Purgatory is so hard to bear that it surpasses all that one can endure, see, or imagine here below, in the way of suffering.—Ser. IV. "De igne purgatorii."

"The greatest pains and sufferings of this life, says St. Thomas, are less than the smallest sufferings of Purgatory.—IV. Dist., 9, 1, a. 1.

It is in vain, dearly beloved brethren, that heresy has pretended to destroy the truth of the existence of Purgatory by denying it, in spite of Holy Writ and Tradition. Common sense and the human heart reply: "What you say is false, you vainly seek to deceive us." In fact, common sense revolts at the idea that very great sinners who have found grace before God at their last hour by an act of contrition, a cry of repentance should be immediately received into heaven, just like innocent souls who had never committed grievous sin or like repentant sinners, who have passed their lives in the practice of most rigorous penance.

Now-a-days, we are often asked with painful anxiety what we think of the state of such and such a one who has lived a life of disorder or of religious indifference, for whom death came unexpectedly, and who quitted this world without any sign of repentance.

Assuredly their salvation is very uncertain, and there is little hope for them; above all, with the heretical teaching that there is no longer expiation after death, that there remains now but heaven or hell. All or nothing.

But the doctrine of Purgatory authorizes us to entertain some hope for the salvation of these sinners so dearly loved, since the wisdom and mercy of God have prepared a place of expiation after death.

This is how a modern preacher, the learned Father Montsabre, speaks of these unfortunate souls: "But those who are surprised by death in their sins, those who have hardly time to shed a tear, and to make one sign in reply to the supreme appeal, which we address to their conscience, must we believe they are eternally lost to us? Alas! we know but too well what they owe to divine justice, and we can-



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not conceive what the mercy of God could do for them, if beyond the tomb, there were nothing but this terrible "All or Nothing." "All is finished," and since we have loved these unhappy ones, it only remains for us to mourn their fate and drown their memory with inconsolable tears. My God! how barbarous is the doctrine which forces me to this despair! But it is not yours, O Lord!"

The author continues to say with justice that a single movement of the heart imperceptible to men but perceptible to God suffices to obtain pardon for the sinner, and that often, according to the expression of the mystical poet, Dante, the demon sees his prey escape him, because of one poor little tear. Yes, for one poor little tear, because there is a Purgatory. And then what happiness for us to think that our dear dead are not completely separated from us, and that there is a bond of love which unites us, and that there is a means of communing with them.

But, dearly beloved brethren, when we speak to you of the infinite mercy of God in saving sinners at their last hour, we have no intention of encouraging slothfulness in the divine service, but we desire to reassure timid minds and repress the excessive severity which would deprive the souls of Purgatory of the prayers they need. We desire to encourage you to succor, to relieve them, and to prove your unalterable fidelity even beyond the tomb. We desire to vivify your faith by appealing to your hearts. What more consoling than the dogma of the communion of saints! "Credo Sanctorum Communionem." We believe that the Church Militant on earth forms with the Church triumphant in Heaven, and the Church suffering in Purgatory, one and the same body, under one and the same head, Jesus Christ, who animates and vivifies all the parts of the grand whole. We believe, with St. Paul, that in the same way as the human body, composed of divers members, receives one and the same life, by the circulation of the same blood, and forms one only body, animated by one only soul; in the same way also, the faithful who are the members of the same body of Jesus Christ, participate in the same divine life, and can consequently mutually aid one another, although they live in different places and states. Yes, we can solace our suffering brethren in Purgatory, because we believe in the communion of saints. What sweet consolation for loving and faithful hearts!

(To be continued.)



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