

PASTORAL LETTER.

We publish the following very able pastoral letter of his Grace Arch bishop Walsh, which he wrote when Bishop of London. It was largely quoted in our leader of last week, but its solid arguments and touching thoughts will bear repetition and be useful reading during this month of the dead. *FR. CATH. REGISTER.*

To the Clergy, Religious and Laity of the Diocese, Health and Benediction in the Lord.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN.

The approach of the month of November, with its "All Souls Day," is for us an appropriate occasion for addressing you on the consoling and salutary doctrine of Purgatory and on the duties of piety and charity towards the faithful departed, that spring from it. The Church, in consecrating this month to special devotion for those who have died in Christ, seems to have formed an alliance with nature in order the better to attune our minds to solemn thoughts of death and to touch and move our hearts with the sacred memories of those who have gone before us. November is the graveyard of the year. The withered, fallen leaves; the naked trees; the hush and silence of the woods; the dark, short melancholy days; the moaning winds, that seem like the dirge of nature over its departed glories and its present sad desolations—all these characteristics of our November strongly impress the mind with thoughts of decay and death. They remind us that, in the language of Scripture, "All flesh is grass and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass; the grass is withered and the flower is fallen."—Is. xl., 6. They tell us that, in the words of the Psalmist, "In the morning man shall grow up like grass, in the morning he shall flourish and pass away; in the evening he shall fall, grow dry and wither."—Psalms lxxxix., 6. The Holy Church takes up these voices and warnings of nature, and, blending them with her own, teaches her children that, at this season of the year, they shall occupy themselves with salutary thoughts concerning death and the dead; that, mindful of the certainty of their own death one day, they should not forget those who have gone before them, but should, by prayers and almsdeeds, and especially by the oblation of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, seek to bring them aid and refreshment and to hasten their advent into that eternal rest and everlasting light and unending and perfect happiness which are enjoyed in the Kingdom of God. For there is a place of punishment in the next life, where some souls suffer for a time before they can go to Heaven, and these souls may be helped and relieved by prayers, almsdeeds and other good works.

For us Catholics there can be no doubt about the doctrine of Purgatory, for it is a defined article of our faith that there is a middle state in the next life, where some souls are detained for a short time before they reach their immortal and happy destiny, but it is useful to show that this, like all the other doctrines of the Church, is in strict accord with right reason and in perfect harmony with the revealed word of God.

In treating this question we must, for the proper understanding of it, lay down certain preliminary propositions:

We will premise by stating that every sin is not mortal, and does not deserve eternal punishment, according to the laws of divine justice; but that there are less grievous sins which are, from their nature, venial, and do not destroy grace and charity; and it is to such the Scripture refers when it declares that the just man falls seven times. Hence, the just can truly use the words of the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses." St. John

declares that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1st Epis. St. John, 1st chap.) Our Lord even assures us that "for every idle word we speak, we shall render an account on the day of judgment." (Matthew, chap. 12.) Would it not be monstrous, for instance, to assert that the telling of a jocular lie were equal in gravity to the horrible crime of parricide, or the shameful sin of adultery, and that it deserves a like punishment? Hence, St. Augustine says that, "for those daily, transient and venial offences, without which this life is not lived, the daily prayers of the faithful satisfy."

We must, in the second place, premise that, even when God pardons the truly penitent the eternal punishment due to mortal sin, He does not always forgive certain temporal chastisements which remain to be endured or expiated by the forgiven sinner.

Our first parents disobeyed the command which God gave them—they sinned. God pardoned their sin, but oh! how terrible were the temporal punishments inflicted on that sin! They were banished from Paradise and were condemned to death, and that sentence of death comprised all their posterity. By their sin there came into the world pestilences, famines, plagues, wars, sickness and death. Moses and Aaron, for having sinned at the water of contradiction by want of confidence, were never permitted to enter the promised land, and though Moses feasted his eyes upon its beauties, yet, as a temporal punishment of his sin, he was never allowed to set his foot upon its soil. David, than whom there was never a greater penitent, offended God. The prophet of the Lord was sent to him. He confessed his sin, exclaiming, "I have sinned against the Lord." The prophet said to him, "the Lord also hath taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die, nevertheless, because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing the child that is born thee shall surely die." There remains, therefore, a temporal punishment due even to forgiven sin.

We should also understand that no sin, according to God's ordinary providence, can or will be forgiven without satisfying, as to all the punishment due to it, the laws of divine justice.

Now, it can happen, and it too often happens, that the just depart from this life still stained with venial sins, or bound by the debt of the temporal punishment yet due for mortal sins forgiven, as to their guilt, and the eternal punishment due to them.

Men die suddenly in many ways—some by heart disease, others by apoplexy; some are found dead in their beds; others are killed by accident on trains or steamboats—and thus have not time to repent of venial sins, and die stained with their guilt. It is certain that the number of souls who thus die in venial sin, or who have not discharged the temporal punishment due mortal sin forgiven, is very great. No sin shall go unpunished; unless it be punished by the sinner himself, by penance, it must be punished by God, who is offended. Divine mercy does not violate the rights of eternal justice, but respects and conserves them. Hence, whilst it forgives the guilt of sin and the eternal punishment due to it, it does not absolve from the debt of temporary punishment to be undergone in order to satisfy justice. Now as nothing defiled can ever enter the kingdom of Heaven, and no debt of punishment due to sin can coexist with eternal beatitude, it necessarily follows that, before the imperfect can enter Heaven, they must be purged from the stains of venial sins and from the debt of temporal punishment due to forgiven grievous sins. But, since this does not always take place in this life, it must necessarily take place in

the next, and hence the necessity of Purgatory, or a place of punishment in the other life, whosoever souls suffer for a time before they can go to Heaven.

We now come to the Scriptural proofs of this doctrine. In the Second Book of Machabees (xii., 46) it is related that the heroic and pious Judas Machabean sent 1,200 drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifices to be offered for his soldiers slain in battle, and the inspired writer, commenting on this fact, says, "It is therefore a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins." Now, it would be perfectly useless to pray for the dead if they were in Heaven, and worse than useless to pray for them were they condemned to eternal torments. There must be, therefore, in the belief of the inspired writer of this book of Scripture, an intermediate place, where, in the next life, some souls are detained, and who may be loosed from their sins by pious prayers and suffrages. I am aware that some Catholics contend that this Second Book of Machabees is not canonical Scripture, but the very same authority from which we hold the whole Canon of Scripture, namely, the authority of the Catholic Church, holds this also to be canonical and inspired Scripture. But, admitting, for argument's sake that it is not canonical, it must be admitted, at all events, to be perfectly true and reliable history. It, therefore, proves that, amongst the Jews the people of God—in those days the belief prevailed that some of the departed dead could be relieved and loosed from their sins, and the penalties of their sins, by prayer and sacrifices, and this could not be the case if, besides the Heaven of the saved, and the hell of the damned, there did not exist an intermediate place of expiation for some souls ere they could reach their immortal and final destiny in Heaven. Our Lord, who came to teach the truth and to point out the errors and corruptions that had crept into Jewish belief and practice, would have condemned this doctrine were it not true, but, so far from doing so, he confirms it. It is of this prison, according to the Holy Fathers, our Lord speaks when he says (Luke xii., 5, 9): "Thou shalt not depart thence till thou hast paid the last farthing." In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, our Lord tells us that the latter, after his death, was carried to the bosom of Abraham. Now, what place was this? It could not have been Heaven, for no one could enter Heaven before the death of Christ, nor could it have been hell, for then the prayer of Dives to Lazarus would have been without meaning or purpose. It must, therefore, have been that middle place in which the souls of the just of the old law were detained until after the death and resurrection of Christ. xvi., 22.)

Again, in First Epistle of Peter (iii., 19), we read, "Christ died for our sins, being put to death in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit, in which, also, coming, he preached to those spirits that were in prison." Now, what was this prison? It was not surely the hell of the damned, but that hell or prison of which the Apostles' Creed speaks, in which were detained the souls of God's servants who died before Christ, and to whom the Saviour came to announce the glad tidings of their liberation and of their eternal salvation. It is of those spirits the scripture speaks when it says of Christ that, ascending on high, He led captivity captive (Chap. 4, v. 8), that is, he freed from the captivity of their prison the patriarchs, prophets, and just of the old law, and led them in triumphant entry into heaven on the day of the ascension.

Our blessed Lord and teacher tells us in Matthew (chap. xii., 32), "That he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost the sin shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in the

world to come." These words manifestly imply that sins may be forgiven in the world to come, and, therefore, there must be a middle place wherein this forgiveness could be meted out, as it could not take place in either heaven or hell, and this is the meaning which the Holy Fathers, with a striking unanimity, attach to this text.

The last scriptural authority to which we shall call attention in proof of a middle place, or purgatory in the next life, is taken from St. Paul's 1st epistle to the Corinthians (iii., 13, 15), where the apostle says, "The day of the Lord shall be revealed by fire, and that fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's works abide, he shall receive a reward. If any man's works be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire." Here the apostle draws a distinction between perfect works done in charity, which stand the test of fire, and bring rewards to their authors, and imperfect works and venial sins, which are burnt by purgatorial fires, whilst their authors are saved by those purgatorial fires.

The general council of Florence, held in 1450, and in which the Greek and Latin churches were united, teaches that these words are to be understood of the fires of Purgatory, and so do all the Greek and Latin Fathers, and the constant tradition of the Church. In fact, the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church, and of all the Christian ages down to the sixteenth century, testifies that a belief in a middle state of purgatorial expiation in the next life was a doctrine of Christian faith firmly, constantly and universally held and acted upon. The east and west, the north and south—in other words, the universal Church of Christ, from the earliest ages downwards, held and taught the doctrine of purgatory and the farther and co-relative doctrine that the souls detained therein could be assisted, relieved and freed by prayers, almsdeeds and by the unbloody sacrifice of the altar. Hence, the Council of Trent, basing its teaching on the word of God and the unanimous tradition of the Christian ages, defined and decreed that "there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar." And this brings us to the consoling doctrine that those prisoners of hope may be helped, relieved and freed from their purgatorial prison by our prayers, almsdeeds and other good works, but chiefly by the holy sacrifice of the Mass. No doctrine of our holy religion has more undeniable proofs of its antiquity than this of the duty of praying for the dead in Christ, and the benefits they derive from this holy sacrifice. No proof of the existence of a middle state could be more convincing than this of the unfailing tradition and practice of the Church. Of what use, without the existence of a middle state, could be prayers for the dead? They could be no use to the just in heaven, for as St. Augustine says, "he who prays for a martyr does injury to the martyr;" of none to the damned, for out of hell there is no redemption. Tertullian, who lived in the age next to that of the apostles, speaking of a pious widow, says: "She prays for the soul of her husband, and begs refreshment for him." St. Cyprian, in the following age, is, in several pages of his writings, a witness to this belief and practice of the Church in his day. As far back as the fourth century, St. Cyril testifies that it was the custom to pray for those who had departed this life, believing it to be a great assistance to those souls for whom prayers are offered while the holy and tremendous sacrifice is going on." St. Chrysostom, who flourished within three hundred years of the age of the apostles, writes as