

Purgatory: God's Act of Mercy

As we are fully aware, when a person dies, they will be judged immediately by Christ. In Catholic Tradition, this is called the Particular Judgment. It is at this moment when the person will be given their eternal sentence: Heaven or hell. Yet, in order to enter Heaven and be in the presence of God, one must be perfect, pure and holy. St. John writes, *"Nothing unclean shall enter it"* (Revelation 21:27). *"Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5:8). Sacred Scripture makes it quite clear for us; God desires all of us to be with Him in Heaven. For those of us who die in a state of grace (free of mortal sin) but not yet made perfect, God has given us this great merciful gift of Purgatory. It is here that we are made pure and holy and worthy to enter into the Kingdom of God. Venial sins are less serious and do not destroy our relationship with God. But yet our relationship is wounded and carries punishment. Once a sin is forgiven, punishment still remains. Because of God's mercy, it can be remitted in this life through absolution in the Sacrament of Confession. The Catholic Church teaches that the fate of those in Purgatory (Church Suffering) can be directly affected by the actions of the living (Church Militant). This is seen in Sacred Scripture, in the Book of 2 Maccabees. It describes the practice of prayer for the dead. There is a misconception among our Protestant brothers and sisters who view Purgatory as a second chance for the unrepentant or a "get out of jail free card" for those who have lived in sin. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states, "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (1030). In 1999, Saint Pope John Paul II referred to Purgatory as "a condition of existence", implying that it is most likely not an actual physical location or place, but is a state wherein "those who, after death, exist in a state of purification, are already in the love of Christ who removes from them the remnants of imperfection." CCC 211 states: *How can we help the souls being purified in purgatory? Because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice. They also help them by almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance.* In general, Protestant churches reject the doctrine of Purgatory. One of their central beliefs is sola scriptura ("scripture alone"). The Protestant Bible excludes deuterocanonical books such as 2 Maccabees, which discusses Purgatory. Another belief held by many Protestants is sola fide ("by faith alone"). They believe that through faith alone is salvation achieved. Actions and good works are merely evidence of that faith. As Catholics, we are instructed to pray for the souls that have passed on. We can combine our prayers with those in Heaven (Church Triumphant) to help release the souls in Purgatory. Our Lord gave St. Gertrude the Great the following prayer that would release 1000 souls from Purgatory each time it is said reverently. The prayer was extended to include living sinners as well. *"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, those in my own home and within my family. Amen."* -Sherrie Clutts DRE