

2. November 2023

The Blessed Souls of purgatory

2 Macc 12:43-45

Judas Maccabee took a collection from them individually, amounting to nearly two thousand drachmas, and sent it to Jerusalem to have a sacrifice for sin offered, an action altogether fine and noble, prompted by his belief in the resurrection. For had he not expected the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead, whereas if he had in view the splendid recompense reserved for those who make a pious end, the thought was holy and devout. Hence, he had this expiatory sacrifice offered for the dead, so that they might be released from their sin.

After the Solemnity of All Saints, the commemoration of the faithful departed immediately follows. They belong to the so-called "purgative Church", i.e. they are our brothers and sisters who are still waiting for the beatific vision of God and are undergoing their last purification.

Unfortunately, we tend to remember them too infrequently! We should keep them in our prayers every day, for the state in which they find themselves is, in a certain sense, quite painful, even though they are already certain of being saved.

What is so painful about the state in which the souls in purgatory find themselves?

Purgatory is the place where our soul must go if, through our own fault, we have not responded sufficiently to God's love in our earthly life. Perhaps we have already begun to love, but we have not given a full response. This could be especially true for those who perhaps only shortly before they died recognised the Lord and called on His name; or for those who belatedly awoke from spiritual mediocrity, and who now, in the light of God, recognise what they missed.

This is indeed a very painful state, hence they are called "poor souls" in purgatory. Let us imagine this situation on a personal level: it turns out that, through negligence, we failed to take advantage of so many opportunities that the Lord gave us to put love into practice. Perhaps our prayer could have saved souls. After our death, perhaps those who were in need of our prayer will be shown to us. How much pain this will cause us! It is a suffering that comes from love, as we realise that we have wasted opportunities to do good, especially if we realise that it was God who asked us to do so. God wants us to pray for the souls in

purgatory, and it is a work of spiritual mercy!

But we can also easily imagine the situation of having discovered the love of Jesus and of longing for it, but not yet being able to see Him... What pain this state will cause, even if we are certain that the time will come when we will be able to contemplate it! Love tends towards unification with the Beloved, and waiting is painful, even more so if the delay is due to one's own guilt.

But, according to St Catherine of Genoa, purgatory is not only a place of torment; it is also a place of great consolation. St. Francis de Sales summarises this saint's "Treatise on Purgatory":

“The idea of purgatory is much more appropriate to comfort us than to cause us fear. While the sorrows of the state of purification are so great that not even the most extreme sufferings of this life can compare with them, the interior delights there are so magnificent that no happiness or pleasure of this world can equal them. For: 1) the souls are in constant unification with God; 2) they have fully submitted themselves to His holy Will, and their own will is moulded to the Will of God to the point of wanting nothing but what God wills, so that, even if the gates of heaven were open to them, they would not dare to present themselves before God while they still perceive in themselves traces of sin; 3) they purify themselves there willingly and lovingly, only to please God; 4) they want to be there as God pleases and as long as He wills; 5) they no longer commit sin; they have not the slightest movement of impatience nor do they commit the slightest fault; 6) they love God above all things, with a perfect, pure and unselfish love; 7) the blessed souls are comforted there by the angels; 8) they have the certainty of their salvation and live in a hope that will never again disappoint their expectations; 9) their bitterest bitterness is in deep peace; 10) although this place is a hell in terms of suffering, it is also a paradise in terms of the sweetness that God's love pours into their hearts: a love that is stronger than death and more potent than hell; 11) this state is more to be longed for than feared, for its flames are flames of a holy longing and love; 12) nevertheless, they are terrible, because they delay the moment of reaching the fullness, which consists in contemplating and loving God, and, through this contemplation and this love, praising and glorifying Him for all eternity”.

On a mission Harpa Dei was doing in Mexico, we had a very moving experience. We were in Querétaro singing Holy Mass. The priest who was celebrating was the exorcist of the Diocese. Suddenly, during the sermon, the priest stopped, and claimed that the souls in purgatory had come, and asked all the faithful gathered there, to offer communion for them. These souls had told him that they had been attracted by the music, for it was the

harmonies they heard from afar, coming from Heaven. This experience was a great gift to us, which helped us to understand the great value of Sacred Music and, at the same time, to keep the souls in purgatory more present in our prayers.

There are several reasons why we should not neglect prayer for the souls in purgatory. On the one hand, it is God's will that we help them; it is part of the commandment of love. But it is also an act of Christian prudence, for those souls for whom we pray and whom we help to reach Heaven soon, will never forget us; they will intercede for us. We can entrust our intentions to them and ask them, in turn, to intercede for us, so that we too may one day reach the Presence of the Lord and, if possible, without having to pass through intermediate stations.

„Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.“