

20. April 2026

“Purgatory–Purification after Death”

The important but often misunderstood topic of Purgatory still falls within the scope of our reflections on the last things, and despite its seriousness, it is a very comforting teaching.

We must assume that most people cannot immediately attain full union with God after death, for this is possible only when a person is completely purified. At the same time, we hope that as few people as possible will go to hell—preferably none at all—which is left entirely to God’s love and justice. Against this backdrop, the profound meaning of the doctrine of Purgatory becomes clear. It springs from the wisdom of God’s love and constitutes an act of His mercy. Thus, for people who did not respond sufficiently to God’s love during their earthly life, there is still a path of purification after death.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states the following in Article 12:

“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.” (CCC 1030)

St. Francis de Sales summarizes aspects of St. Catherine of Genoa’s teaching on Purgatory as follows:

“The thought of Purgatory ought rather to comfort than to terrify. It is true that the torments of Purgatory are so great that the most acute sufferings of this life cannot be compared with them; but, then, on the other hand, the inward satisfaction of the sufferers is such that no amount of earthly prosperity or contentment can equal it. The souls who are waiting there enjoy a continual union with God. Their wills are in perfect subjection to His will; or, to speak more correctly, their wills are so absolutely transformed into the will of God that they cannot will anything but what He wills. If Paradise were open to them, they would rather cast themselves down into hell than appear before God stained and defiled as they see themselves still to be. They accept their Purgatory lovingly and willingly, because it is the good pleasure of God. They wish to be there, in the manner in which it pleases God that they should be, and for as long as He wills. They cannot sin.

They cannot feel the slightest movement of impatience. Nor be guilty of the smallest imperfection. They love God more than themselves and more than any other creature, and with a perfect, pure, and disinterested love. They are in Purgatory consoled by the angels. They are secure of their salvation. They are in a state of hope, which cannot but be realized. Their grief is holy and calm. In short, if Purgatory is a species of hell as regards suffering, it is a species of Paradise as regards charity. The charity which quickens those holy souls is stronger than death, more powerful than hell; its lamps are all of fire and flame. Neither servile fear nor mercenary hope has any part in their pure affection. Purgatory is a happy state, more to be desired than dreaded, for all its flames are flames of love and sweetness. Yet still it is to be dreaded, since it delays the end of all perfection, which consists in seeing God, and therefore fully loving Him, and by this sight and by this love praising and glorifying Him through all eternity.”¹

We understand that the state of these souls is, on the one hand, full of pain, because they have not yet attained their goal—union with God—for which they yearn with all their hearts and now long for ardently. Added to this is the fact that, according to God’s decree, they still have to endure a penitential suffering. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the temporal punishments for sin in Purgatory are expiated through what is called *satispassio* (“sufficient suffering”), that is, through a willing endurance of the penitential suffering imposed by God.

On the other hand, the poor souls see themselves as saved and know that, as children of God, they may look forward to their perfect union with God with joy and gratitude. They themselves can no longer actively do anything to achieve this, but they can receive help through the Church.

Here we encounter once again the infinite wisdom of God. The Church, as the communion of saints, comprises the Church Triumphant in Heaven, the Church Militant on Earth, and the Church Suffering in Purgatory. We on earth can intercede before God for our brothers and sisters and pray for them. The Church teaches that our actions here on earth have an impact not only on our own souls but also on the souls of others, especially those in Purgatory. By offering prayers, Masses, and sacrifices for the deceased, we put our faith into concrete action and help the souls who are still in the process of purification. In this way, we can perform

¹ Camus, Jean-Pierre. *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*. London: Burns & Oates, 1925.

good works for our brothers and sisters in the place of purification, which at the same time also serve our own path to holiness.

Indulgences also play an important role in this dimension of faith. Through its spiritual treasury, the Church can grant indulgences that partially or completely alleviate the temporal punishment of sins for the souls in Purgatory. This practice is an expression of love and the communion of saints.

Reflection on the daily reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-triumph-of-light-2/>

Reflection on the daily Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-precious-teachings-of-jesus-2/>