

Handout Part V: Purgatory

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.

2 Maccabees 12:44-45

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them. St. John Chrysostom, Homily on 1 Corinthians 41:5

Although it has always been a teaching of the Church that for some a final purification is necessary before entering into the presence of God, the formulation of this doctrine of faith on Purgatory was formally defined at the First Council of Lyons in 1245; the Second Council of Lyons in 1274; and in the Councils of Florence [1438-45] and Trent [1546-63]. Divine justice requires the reparation for sins and if reparation is not made before death, God in His divine mercy allows reparation to be made after death in the refining fire that destroys the impurities of sin, whether unrepented venial sin and/or the temporal punishment due to mortal sin repented of and forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Church's belief in this doctrine is manifested in the constant and universal practice of prayer and penance which the faithful of God have given even from Old Testament times. The Church teaches, therefore, that Purgatory is reserved for those who have received the gift of salvation:

- CCC# 1030: *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# 1031: *The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire. [..].*
- CCC 1032: *This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beautiful vision of God. The church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead: [..].*

Scripture passages: O.T. = Wisdom 3:1-7; 2 Maccabees 12:44; Job 1:5. N.T. = Luke 16:19-31; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17; Matthew 12:30-32; 1 Peter 1:7; Revelation 20:14