

Psalm 136

Praise the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever;

Praise the God of gods; for his mercy endures forever;

Praise the Lord of lords; for his mercy endures forever;

Who alone has done great wonders, for his mercy endures forever;

Who skillfully made the heavens, for his mercy endures forever;

Who spread the earth upon the waters, for his mercy endures forever;

Who made the great lights, for his mercy endures forever;

The sun to rule the day, for his mercy endures forever;

The moon and stars to rule the night, for his mercy endures forever;

Who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his mercy endures forever;

And led Israel from their midst, for his mercy endures forever;

With mighty hand and outstretched arm, for his mercy endures forever;

Who split in two the Red Sea, for his mercy endures forever;

And led Israel through its midst, for his mercy endures forever;

But swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, for his mercy endures forever;

Who led the people through the desert, for his mercy endures forever;

Who struck down great kings, for his mercy endures forever;

Slew powerful kings, for his mercy endures forever;

Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his mercy endures forever;

Og, king of Bashan, for his mercy endures forever;

And made their lands a heritage, for his mercy endures forever;

A heritage for Israel, his servant, for his mercy endures forever.

The Lord remembered us in our low estate, for his mercy endures forever;

Freed us from our foes, for his mercy endures forever;

And gives bread to all flesh, for his mercy endures forever.

Praise the God of heaven, for his mercy endures forever.

Purgatory and Indulgences: God's mercy endures forever!

The Last Four Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell – Purgatory?

Some terminology – the three categories of the Body of Christ:

- The Church Triumphant – the souls in heaven
- The Church Suffering – the souls in purgatory
- The Church Militant – the souls still on earth

Miriam-Webster Dictionary: **Militant** - engaged in warfare or combat: fighting.

What are we fighting for? For the holiness to one day enter the Heavenly Kingdom.

What is Purgatory? Short answer: God's mercy endures forever! (Psalm 136)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

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.

The Councils of Florence and Trent state:

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: [see 1 Cor 3:15 "But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire."]

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come. [from St. Gregory the Great]

Scripture teaches, nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven (Rev. 21:27) and, while we may die with our mortal sins forgiven, there can still be many impurities in us, specifically venial sins and the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven.

Rev. 21:26-27: Entry into The New Jerusalem (i.e., heaven).

²⁶ The treasure and wealth of the nations will be brought there, ²⁷ but nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who does abominable things or tells lies. Only those will enter whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

When we die, we undergo what is called the **particular judgment**. Scripture says:

"It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

We are judged instantly, and we know at once what our final destiny will be. At the end of time, when Jesus returns, there will come the **general judgment** to which the Bible refers, for example, in Matthew 25:31-32:

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” In this general judgment all our sins will be publicly revealed (Luke 12:2–5).

In *The City of God*, St Augustine writes:

“Temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before that last and strictest judgment.” It is between the particular and general judgments, then, that the soul is purified of the remaining consequences of sin: “I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper” (Luke 12:59).

What purgatory is not.

Purgatory is not a second chance for people who have not been good disciples of Jesus during their lives.

The Church makes very few binding statements about what purgatory is. The critical statement is:

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).

Purgatory is only for those who “die in God’s grace and friendship,” without unforgiven mortal sin.

Some claim that **the word** purgatory is not found in Scripture.” But this does not disprove the existence of purgatory. It has always been part of Church teaching. The words *Trinity* and *Incarnation* are not in Scripture either, yet those doctrines are clearly taught in Scripture, and most Christians accept them on faith.

Christ refers to the sinner who “will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matt. 12:32), suggesting that one can be freed after death of the consequences of one’s sins. Similarly, Paul tells us that when we are judged, each man’s work will be tried. And what happens if a righteous man’s work fails the test?

“He will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15).

Now this loss cannot refer to hell, since no one is saved there. Nor can it mean heaven, since there is no suffering (“fire”) there. Only the doctrine of purgatory explains this passage.

The ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***:

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.” [see below] 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 beatific vision of God.⁶¹⁰ The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead: Let us help and commemorate them.

Expiation for the Dead. (2 Maccabees 12:46) **Judas Maccabeus** (died 161/160 bc) was a Jewish leader who defended his country from invasion by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, preventing the imposition of Hellenism upon Judaea, and preserving the Jewish faith.

³⁹ ... Judas [Maccabee] and his companions went to gather up the bodies of the fallen and bury them with their kindred in their ancestral tombs. ... ⁴⁰ But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. ... ⁴² Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. ... ⁴³ He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection in mind; ⁴⁴ for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. ⁴⁵ But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. ⁴⁶ **Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin.**

The Jews believed in praying and making atonement for the dead. This is the faith in which Jesus and the apostles were raised. In this context, Jesus declares:

And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or *in the age to come* (Matthew 12:32).

This implies there are at least *some* sins that can be forgiven in the next life.

The sin of the Maccabean soldiers was one of idolatry, a very serious sin, but God alone knows the degree of their culpability. Our hope is that they repented before they died. Still, Jews (and Catholics) hope for the possible salvation of those who have died.

Prayers are not needed by those in heaven, and no amount of prayer can help those in hell. Conveniently, at the time of the Reformation, Protestants cut the books of the Maccabees out of their Bibles.

Orthodox Jews today recite a prayer known as the *Mourner's Kaddish* for eleven months after the death of a loved one so that the loved one may be purified. The Catholic Church did not invent the doctrine of purgatory. Rather, other churches rejected a doctrine that had always been believed by Jews and Christians.

The witness from the early Church:

Graffiti in the catacombs during the first three centuries recorded prayers for the dead. Writings outside the Bible, such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* (written during the second century), also refer to the Christian practice of praying for the dead.

The Acts of Paul and Thecla

"And after the exhibition, Tryphaena again received her [Thecla]. For her daughter Falconilla had died, and said to her in a dream: 'Mother, you shall have this stranger Thecla in my place, in order that she may pray concerning me, and that I may be transferred to the place of the righteous'" (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* [A.D. 160]).

The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity

"[T]hat very night, this was shown to me in a vision: I [Perpetua] saw Dinocrates going out from a gloomy place, where also there were several others, and he was parched and very thirsty, with a filthy countenance and pallid color, and the wound on his face which he had when he died. This Dinocrates

had been my brother after the flesh, seven years of age, who died miserably with disease. . . . For him I had made my prayer, and between him and me there was a large interval, so that neither of us could approach to the other . . . and [I] knew that my brother was in suffering. But I trusted that my prayer would bring help to his suffering. . . . I made my prayer for my brother day and night, groaning and weeping that he might be granted to me. Then, on the day on which we remained in fetters, this was shown to me: I saw that the place which I had formerly observed to be in gloom was now bright; and Dinocrates, with a clean body well clad, was finding refreshment. . . . [And] he went away from the water to play joyously, after the manner of children, and I awoke. Then I understood that he was translated from the place of punishment" (*The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* 2:3–4 [A.D. 202]).

Tertullian

"We offer sacrifices for the dead on their birthday anniversaries [the date of death—birth into eternal life. For the same reason, feast days of the saints are on the date of their death.]" (*The Crown* 3:3 [A.D. 211]).

"A woman, after the death of her husband . . . prays for his soul and asks that he may, while waiting, find rest; and that he may share in the first resurrection. And each year, on the anniversary of his death, she offers the sacrifice" (*Monogamy* 10:1–2 [A.D. 216]).

There are many other examples. Such prayers would have been offered only if early Christians believed in purgatory, even if they did not use that word. The early Christians were orthodox in their beliefs. They tested a doctrine's veracity by asking, "**Was it handed on from the apostles?**" They must have understood that the oral teaching of the apostles, sacred Tradition, confirmed their beliefs.

The Bible also speaks of **the limbo of the Fathers**, where the just who had died before the redemption were waiting for heaven to be opened to them. After his death and before his resurrection, Christ visited those experiencing the limbo of the Fathers and preached to them the good news that heaven would now be opened to them:

(1 Pet. 3:18-20). These people were not in heaven nor hell:

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit. ¹⁹ In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.

The Greek word for prison, *phulake*, the word used by St. Peter to describe where Jesus descended after his death to liberate Old Testament believers.

In the Creed, we say, "**He descended into hell.**" But this is not the eternal hell of the damned from which no one escapes

Is the limbo of the Fathers the same as purgatory? We do not know, but it shows that the existence of a temporary, intermediate place after death is not contrary to Scripture.

Jesus says (Matt 5:48):

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How many of us will be perfectly sanctified at the time of our deaths? Probably most, if not all of us, will be in need of further purification in order to enter the gates of heaven, assuming we die in a state of grace.

Unlike the damned, those in purgatory have the joy of knowing that, upon purification, they will enter eternal life in heaven.

Opponents call purgatory “a denial of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice.” Repentance (and sacramental confession) may have gained the grace needed to be worthy of heaven, which is to say, one has been forgiven and their soul is spiritually alive. But that’s not sufficient for gaining entrance into heaven. One needs to be cleansed completely.

While Christ accomplished salvation for us on the cross for all, how is this redemption applied to us? Scripture reveals that it is applied to us over the course of time through, among other things, the process of sanctification through which the Christian is made holy. Sanctification involves suffering. St. Paul says:

Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom. 5:3–5).

Purgatory is the final phase of Christ’s applying to us the purifying redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross.

When asked, “Are you saved?”, your answer should be I am saved, I am being saved, and I hope to be saved. Salvation is a process, a case of already, but not yet.

Hebrews 12:14 states that we must strive “for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

The Apostle St. Paul himself was uncertain of his state in the eyes of God. He said:

No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. **1 Corinthians 9:27**

“Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall.” **1 Corinthians 10:12**

In Matthew 12:32 Jesus said that some sins:

“will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

This suggests that there are some sins that *will* be forgiven in the age to come. If there is no purification after death, then this passage doesn’t make sense. The Church doesn’t exclude the possibility that purgatory could be an instantaneous purification. Once we die, we no longer exist in space and time.

In Paul’s letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:4), God:

... wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

Purgatory is consistent with the love and mercy of God. God wants us to be perfect (Matt. 5:48). If we are not perfected by the time we die, we will be perfected in purgatory. He loves us too much to allow us to be less than what he created us to be. Purgatory is not about an angry God inflicting punishment upon his creatures. It is about a loving Father who “disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

After Confession, does God forget our sins? No, he doesn't. He's omniscient and knows everything. But God does forgive our sins, and when that happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he remits the eternal consequences of our sin, for which the just penalty of Hell. But he may or may not remit the temporal consequences of our sins. If someone has been reconciled in confession and dies before they can sin again, we can definitely say they are going to go to Heaven or Purgatory.

They will go to Heaven eventually, but God may or may not have remitted the temporal consequences. God can do what he chooses, so he could possibly have someone go straight to Heaven, or he could possibly have them cleaned up in Purgatory.

Can the Souls in Purgatory Pray for Us?

There is no definitive teaching of the Church on the subject; even the ordinary magisterium, which is infallible, does not provide a unanimous affirmative to this question, so the faithful are allowed to have differing opinions on this. What is unanimous and scriptural, formally defined by the Council of Trent, is that our prayers on earth aid the Church suffering, most especially by the holy sacrifice of the Mass, by reducing their suffering and shortening the "time" of their purgation. What greater motive is there to show our love for our departed family and friends?

St. Thomas (II-II.83.11) **denied** that the souls in purgatory can pray for the living, stating they are not in a position to pray for us, rather we must make intercession for them.

The Doctor of the Church, Saint Robert Bellarmine (*De Purgatorio, lib. II, xv,*), **disagreed** with Saint Thomas, saying that because they are secure in their salvation, and permanently united to God, they have a greater love for him than we do.

Saint Catherine of Bologna, a fifteenth-century mystic, said:

"Whenever she desired any favor, [she] had recourse to the souls in purgatory, and was immediately heard."

Saint Alphonsus, in his work "*The Great Means of Salvation,*" chap. I, III, 2, says:

"The souls in purgatory, being beloved by God and confirmed in grace, have absolutely no impediment to prevent them from praying for us."

While we may not invoke the souls in purgatory during the Church's liturgy, we may have confidence that God manifests our intentions to them. God, through his mercy, allows our prayers to help them gain access to the beatific vision.

The Apostolic Pardon

The anointing of the sick is the sacrament given to those who are seriously ill. The Apostolic Pardon is a blessing with an indulgence that happens at the conclusion of the anointing of the sick if the recipient is in danger of death. The usual process is auricular confession (if possible), followed by anointing of the sick, followed by the Apostolic Pardon. While confession forgives the eternal punishment for sin, the indulgence attached to the Apostolic Pardon forgives temporal punishment due to sin.

The words of the blessing said by the priest for the Apostolic Pardon are:

“Through the holy mysteries of our redemption may almighty God release you from all punishments in this life and in the life to come. May he open to you the gates of paradise and welcome you to everlasting joy.”

or

“By the authority which the Apostolic See has given me, I grant you a full pardon and the remission of all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Having a priest present when one is near death is a grace that we should always pray for.

Our suffering on earth, when offered up and united with the suffering of Jesus Christ, can lessen our time (or that of others who are deceased) in Purgatory. This is called **Redemptive Suffering**.

More good news about God’s mercy from Pope St. Paul VI, 1967 Doctrine of Indulgences:

Norm 28: "To the faithful in danger of death, who cannot be assisted by a priest to bring them the sacraments and impart the Apostolic Blessing with its plenary indulgence (see can. 468, Sec.2 of Code of Canon Law), Holy Mother Church nevertheless grants a plenary indulgence to be acquired at the point of death, provided they are properly disposed and have been in the habit of reciting some prayers during their lifetime."

Hence, the Church just gives the Apostolic Pardon to the dying in the absence of a priest, provided they are properly disposed. Be properly disposed! Be ready!

Summary of what St. Thomas Aquinas says about purgatory:

St. Thomas Aquinas described purgatory as having two types of pain:

- **Pain of loss:** The delay of the Beatific Vision.
- **Pain of sense:** Punishment by fire.
- **Pain of purgatory is greater than pain of life:** Aquinas believed that the least pain of purgatory is greater than the greatest pain of life. He explained that the more a person desires something, the more painful it is to be absent from it.
- **Purgatory's fire is the same as hell's fire:** Aquinas believed that the fire of purgatory is the same as the fire of hell, but the damned are consigned to a lower place because they are of lower merit.
- **Souls in purgatory are not tormented by demons:** Aquinas believed that souls in purgatory are not tormented by demons because they have resisted demonic temptation in life.
- **Prayers for the dead are acceptable to God:** Aquinas believed that prayers for the dead are acceptable to God because the dead need them and cannot help themselves.
- **The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the most effective way to help souls in purgatory,** according to Aquinas.

Indulgences

Once we die, we are unable to merit anything for ourselves. Just as one needs a body to sin, one needs a body to repent. While we can make reparation for our own sins on while alive, we can no longer do so once we die,

since one needs a body to repent. We must reconcile ourselves to God before death. This is why the Church Militant prays for the Church Suffering, because the Poor Souls can no longer act on their own behalf.

Code of Canon Law: Canon 1752 (the last Canon) reads: “ ... keeping in mind the salvation of souls, which in the Church must always be the supreme law.”

Can anyone here say that they are worthy of heaven? None of us are worthy because of sin.

Fortunately, God is a God of mercy, but also a God of justice. God forgives the sinner who turns to him with a contrite heart, but God’s justice demands expiation, the act of atoning for sin.

When we sin, we willfully commit an offense against God – but we also hurt ourselves and our neighbor.

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

John Donne

MEDITATION XVII

Devotions upon Emergent Occasions

Since sin has a social dimension, it hurts the whole body of the Church. We are a community of believers. **There is no such thing as private sin.** When we sin, we not only offend God, we also offend the entire Body of Christ, the Church. One would never say that they have cancer in one part of their body but are otherwise fine. So too is sin a cancer that affects the whole Body of Christ. Like the ripples when pebble is thrown into a pond, our actions, sinful or good, have consequences that extend to eternity.

God forgives the guilt of the sinner who truly repents of their sin, but in his justice, God demands expiation for sin; that is, we must desire to make amends for the hurt caused by our sin. Though sin is forgiven, the temporal effects of our sin remain. This is called **temporal punishment for sin.**

Pope St. Paul VI put it this way:

“The punishments with which we are concerned here are imposed by God’s judgment, which is just and merciful. The reasons for their imposition are that our souls need to be purified, the holiness of the moral order needs to be strengthened, and God’s glory must be restored to its full majesty” (*Indulgentiarum Doctrina* 2).

Just as a loving parent disciplines a child so that they can learn and grow so too, “the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb. 12:6).

As part of our lives on earth we, the Church Militant, perform acts of penance to both *expiate* or *atone* for our sins so as to achieve “*the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*” Should we die with unforgiven, non-

expiated venial sin on our soul, this sin must be expiated in purgatory before we can enter our heavenly eternal home.

An indulgence can remit all or part of the temporal punishment due to sin.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance. **What is an indulgence? "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."** "An indulgence is **partial or plenary** according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin." The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.

The Church possesses a great treasury – the **Treasury of Merits** or the **Treasury of the Church**.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

1476 We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the Church's treasury, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."

1477 "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body."

The basis for this treasure comes from Sacred Scripture, where in Colossians 1:24-25 the Apostle Paul says:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you."

St. John Paul II, encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*:

Seeking to see man as it were with "the eyes of Christ himself", the Church becomes more and more aware that she is the guardian of a great treasure, which she may not waste but must continually increase. Indeed, the Lord Jesus said: "He who does not gather with me scatters." This treasure of humanity enriched by the inexpressible mystery of divine filiation and by the grace of "adoption as sons" in the Only Son of God, through whom we call God "Abba, Father", is also a powerful force unifying the Church above all inwardly and giving meaning to all her activity.

This treasure of the Church is infinite because of the infinite merits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These merits, along with the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all of the saints in heaven, aid us on our journey to salvation when we call upon them with the right intentions. As the Minister of Redemption, the Church in her supreme mission of the salvation of souls invokes this Treasury to help reconcile penitents and remit the temporal punishment due to sin.

By what authority does the Church do this? In Matthew 18:18 Jesus says to his apostles,

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

1478 An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus, the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.

The Church grants indulgences so that the faithful will expiate sins and also encourage them to do works of penance, charity, and piety, which lead to a spiritual growth. Remember, the Church does not, nor does she have the authority to grant indulgences for unrepented, unforgiven sin. Pope Paul VI stated, “Indulgences cannot be gained without a sincere conversion of outlook and unity with God” (*Indulgentiarum Doctrina* 11). Regarding “how much” remission we receive depends in large part of our sincerity of intention to grow closer and closer to God by reforming our lives and detach ourselves from all forms of sin.

There are two types of indulgences; partial and plenary. A partial indulgence is a partial remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. A plenary indulgence is a full remission of the temporal punishment up to the time the indulgence was received. An indulgence cannot be applied toward sins committed in the future.

To gain an indulgence, you must perform, with a contrite heart, the act to which the indulgence is attached.

- you must go to confession
- receive Holy Communion
- pray for the pope’s intentions
- you must be free from all attachment to sin, including venial sin.

One generally has a two-week time window to perform these acts. If you attempt to receive a plenary indulgence, but are unable to meet the last condition, a partial indulgence is received instead.

Listed below are indulgences listed in the *Handbook of Indulgences* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1991).

- An act of spiritual communion, expressed in any devout formula whatsoever, is endowed with a partial indulgence.
- A partial indulgence is granted the Christian faithful who devoutly spend time in mental prayer.
- A plenary indulgence is granted **when the rosary is recited in a church** or oratory or when it is recited in a family, a religious community, or a pious association. A partial indulgence is granted for its recitation in all other circumstances.

- A partial indulgence is granted the Christian faithful who read sacred Scripture with the veneration due God's word and as a form of spiritual reading. The indulgence will be a plenary one when such reading is done for at least one-half hour [provided the other conditions are met].
- A partial indulgence is granted to the Christian faithful who devoutly sign themselves with the cross while saying the customary formula: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Regarding indulgences, always remember:

- They are **not** a way to buy your way out of hell. After death, one's eternal fate is determined; hell is eternal punishment, and no indulgence can change that.
- They do **not** obtain remission of punishment for future sins. An indulgence is not permission to commit sin.
- They **cannot** forgive sin. An indulgence is granted for sins already forgiven.
- There is no "**time**" associated with an indulgence. When one dies, time as we know it no longer has meaning.
- A person cannot or ever could "**buy**" an indulgence. Unscrupulous individuals in the past may have abused their position in such a way, but it was a sinful action and NEVER sanctioned by the Church. One (of many) possible good works that one could do to obtain an indulgence is almsgiving, but an indulgence would be granted only when the almsgiving (or other acts) were performed with the correct intentions.

The teaching on indulgences is an infallible doctrine of the Church. The Council of Trent stated that it "*condemns with anathema those who say that indulgences are useless or that the Church does not have the power to grant them.*" [Trent, session 25, *Decree on Indulgences*. Indulgences are a gift from a merciful, loving God to his children.

For this reason, Pope Paul VI declared:

"The Church invites all its children to think over and weigh up in their minds as well as they can how the use of indulgences benefits their lives and all Christian society.... Supported by these truths, holy Mother Church again recommends the practice of indulgences to the faithful. It has been very dear to Christian people for many centuries as well as in our own day. Experience proves this" (*Indulgentarium Doctrina*).

As we, the Church Militant, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12), it is reassuring to know that we are not alone. We have the saints in heaven cheering (and praying) for us! Indulgences are God's way for us to draw on this Treasury of Merit to assist us as we run the race toward eternal life with the Trinity. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1474) reminds us that:

"The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. 'The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person.'"

Financial Jargon

If terms like wages, paying the last penny, treasuries, etc. are disturbing remember, Matthew was a tax collector and would have been literate. We know from ancient sources that teachers in the ancient world would often have someone keep notes. [See: Craig Keener, *Christobiography*]

Sin was understood in Jesus's day as a debt. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says, "When you pray, pray like this, "Forgive us our debts." We say trespasses, but the Greek its debt, χρέος. Sin as a debt is a Jewish way of speaking. Romans, Greeks did understand sin as debts, Jews did. How does one get out of the debt? There has to be a payment, a ransom, there has to be atonement, there has to be the price paid for redemption. Jesus will say in the Gospel, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a λύτρα, as a *ransom* for many.

We also see in Matthew this economic theme because redemption is there. The Gospel of Matthew is closely bound up with redemption and salvation, which are not the exact same thing. Salvation is the umbrella, and redemption is under it. Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, otherwise you have no *repayment* in heaven.

The correct word is *repayment* or literally *salary*, μισθον, in the original Greek. You get *repaid* by your Father who is in heaven. All English translations say:

Otherwise, you'll have no reward with your Father in heaven.

Many don't like the idea of a payment since you don't go on to get your eternal repayment, but the actual Greek word is payment. In Matthew 16:27 everyone is fine with the translation:

For the Son of man is about to come in the glory of his Father with His angels, and then he will **repay** each person according to his works.

There are many economic themes in Matthew because it originated with a tax collector.

A recent and excellent resource for this economic language in the Gospels is a book by Nathan Eubank, who teaches at Notre Dame, *The Wages of Cross Bearing*.

On almost every page of Matthew's Gospel, there is economic imagery: repayment, your treasure in heaven, etc. Remember, the ancient world did not have banks like we have today. A bank was a treasury.

Five Common Myths About Purgatory

<https://www.churchpop.com/5-myths-about-purgatory-too-many-people-possibly-even-you-still-believe/>

It's probably safe to say that for most Protestant Christians, there are few doctrines more "Catholic" than Purgatory. Unfortunately, most people's understanding of Purgatory is fraught with myths and misconceptions.

First, here's how the Catechism describes Purgatory: "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. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.

"This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, mentioned in Sacred Scripture... 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 beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead..." (CCC 1030-1032)

Now here are five of the most common myths about Purgatory:

Myth 1: Purgatory is a second chance at salvation

Truth: At death, a person's eternal destiny is sealed: he will either spend eternity in heaven or hell. Purgatory is a temporary place that people who are already assured of heaven may go to in order to prepare for heaven. So, once in Purgatory, a person can't alter their eternal destiny – there are no second chances after death.

Myth 2: Purgatory isn't in the Bible

Truth: In 1 Cor. 3, Saint Paul describes a period after death, but before heaven, in which a Christian is purified with fire. That's Purgatory.

There is other biblical evidence, to name two: In Matt. 12, Jesus mentions the possibility of sins being forgiven after death, and in 2 Macc. 12, the practice of praying for the dead (a practice Purgatory makes sense of) is commended. (For more, see [this great article by Catholic Answers.](#))

Myth 3: Purgatory is a way of being saved apart from Christ

Truth: As already mentioned, Purgatory is only for people who have died in friendship with Christ and are assured of heaven. Further, the purifying process of Purgatory is only through the grace of Jesus Christ. So rather than being something in competition with Christ, Purgatory is an occasion for the grace of Christ.

Myth 4: Indulgences are a way of buying salvation

Truth: An indulgence is something granted by the Church that limits or removes a person's need for Purgatory after death. Indulgences do not, however, determine whether a person goes to heaven or hell.

Further, while historically there have been abuses regarding indulgences, the Catholic Church considers the selling of spiritual things ([simony](#)) a sin.

Myth 5: Praying for the dead is a late medieval corruption of the faith

Truth: Actually, the Jews practiced praying for the dead prior to Jesus, as recorded in 2 Macc. 12. The Early Church [also practiced](#) it.

MAGAZINE

Keeping Up with Loved Ones in Purgatory

We are not separated from our loved ones in purgatory. We are still united to them by grace.

KARLO BROUSSARD • 5/26/2025

Some Protestants criticize the doctrine of purgatory by saying it's "bad news" in contrast to the "good news" of salvation revealed in the Bible. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory is indeed good news, even providing consolation for believers. It does so in a variety of ways.

For one thing, purgatory consoles believers who struggle with sin. We're all too familiar with our own weaknesses. Perhaps it's bingeing of Netflix, texting when someone is trying to have a conversation with you, a brief indulgence of an uncharitable thought, a failure to promptly meet the needs of your spouse or friend when able. The list goes on and on.

It would be pretty darn hard to go through a day without falling short of Christian perfection in some way, at least for us ordinary folks. Such a task would be heroic. Heroes are rare!

Now think about the fact that death can surprise us at any moment. Jesus says, "The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:44). Elsewhere, he says, "Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you" (Rev. 3:3).

If death can come upon us so quickly, and we're as spiritually ill adjusted as we are, it would seem there's no hope for us entering into the glory of heaven. We might not die with our wills turned fully away from God as our life's goal, but the guilt of venial sin and the effects of sin would impede us from entering such glory. Despair of final salvation would be inevitable—that is, if purgatory weren't real.

Purgatory remedies that despair and infuses joy within the soul. It allows believers who love Jesus but continue to struggle with sin in their lives to know that their shortcomings against Christian perfection are not enough to guarantee keeping them from the glory of heaven. What's so bad about that?

Purgatory also consoles us in that it manifests God's love for us. God loves us so much that he does everything he can to make it possible for us to be united with him, including providing us a postmortem opportunity to be freed from venial sin and any remnants of sin that impede us from entrance into heaven.

Isn't God's love for us part of the gospel's "good news"? Sure, it is! Purgatory is a doctrine that manifests such love to us. And all this applies to those we love as well. So purgatory consoles us not just with regard to our own entrance into heaven, but also with regard to our loved ones.

Purgatory gives us the assurance that even though our loved ones die without the perfect holiness required for heaven, we know they're not forever excluded from there. The late Marian scholar Fr. Martin Jugie puts it beautifully:

They who mournfully follow the coffin, are consoled with thoughts of the mercy of God; of the expiation of venial sin and the cleansing of the wounds, left by mortal sin, after death; of extenuating circumstances which may have rendered certain sins venial for the dear deceased one. The anguished heart, torn with dread about the fate of the loved one, clings to this last hope, and there finds solace and some peace.

That's good news!

Next, the doctrine of purgatory provides consolation for a believer because it offers hope that our loved ones who die

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with imperfection aren't forever excluded from heaven. But a believer might still be disheartened by the thought that if his loved one isn't in heaven yet, then he can't have a relationship with that person in the present moment. He would have to wait.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The doctrine of purgatory entails that we can assist our loved ones in purgatory by offering the Mass, prayers, indulgences, almsgiving, and other works of love for them. This is based on the Christian belief in the communion of saints, which includes the souls in purgatory.

The holy souls are still members of the mystical body of Christ. Death did not separate them from us. As St. Paul writes, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall . . . [the] sword? . . . I am sure that neither death . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 38-39).

From this it follows that we are not separated from our loved ones who might be in purgatory. We are still united to them by grace. Consequently, our relationship with them can continue. We don't have to wait until they get to heaven. That provides a believer great consolation. That's definitely not bad news.

Some Protestants say we're blurring the real distinction between the visible (Christians on earth) and invisible (Christians in purgatory) dimensions of the one body of Christ. Just because there's one body, so it's argued, it doesn't follow that our relationship with each dimension is the same.

It's true that our relationship with our loved ones in purgatory is not the same as our relationship with them here on earth. But the relationship we have with them by grace is the same. In fact, it's even better because they're confirmed in grace without the possibility of falling from it. From this it follows that the relationship with them is secure, on condition that we stay in grace.

This relationship we have with them by grace is what allows us to continue expressing love toward them, even though it's not the same kind of expressions of love as when they were on earth. We can't hear or see them when we talk to them. We can't give them a hug. But we can pray for them and will what's good for them—namely, the removal of any impediments to entrance into heaven.

The relationship might not be the same. But it is a relationship nevertheless!

GET PURGATORY IS FOR REAL!

One rationale for this is that the souls in purgatory are perfected in charity. Since charity involves not only love of God, but also love of neighbor, and love of neighbor is expressed in intercessory prayer, it seems reasonable to conclude that the souls in purgatory would express their love by interceding for us.

That our loved ones in purgatory are praying for us is a consoling thought. Their prayer for us, and our private request for their prayers, is one way by which we keep a relationship with them.

It's good news to know we have friends who can't waver in charity and are constantly praying for us. For St. James says, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16).

The consolation we can provide the holy souls in purgatory in turn brings us consolation. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that love is "to wish good to someone," "just as he wills good to himself."

It follows from this definition of love that the good the souls in purgatory experience by having their impediments to heaven removed is experienced as our own good. That means that their consolation is our consolation; their source of joy is our source of joy. As the late Frank Sheed writes, "there is a special joy for the Catholic in praying for his dead, if only the feeling that there is still something he can do for people he loved upon earth."

If you like what you read here, you can find more in [Purgatory Is for Real](#), available at the Catholic Answers shop.