

Brief on Purgatory¹

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The dogma of purgatory was infallibly defined during the Old Testament era and thus was also infallibly defined during the New Covenant era. Hence the Catholic Church from her promulgation in AD 33 has infallibly defined the dogma of purgatory by the unanimous consensus of the apostles and other Church Fathers (which is the ordinary magisterium) and later by several infallible papal decrees (which is the solemn magisterium).

That dogma teaches that purgatory is a place of purification in the underworld where the elect go who died guilty of venial sins and/or who did not expiate all the punishments due to their sins. Not until they were purified could they enter the Limbo of the Fathers during the Old Testament era and enter heaven during the New Covenant era:

“Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? Or who shall rest in thy holy hill? He that walketh without blemish and worketh justice:” (Ps. 14:1-2)

The Prophet Isaias was given a vision of God. And even though he was very holy, he had venial sins and the punishment due to sin that needed to be purged by fire before he was allowed to come into the presence of God:

“And I said: Woe is me, because I have held my peace; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King the Lord of hosts. And one of the seraphims flew to me, and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: Behold this hath touched thy lips and thy iniquities shall be taken away and thy sin shall be cleansed.” (Isa. 6:5-7)

The dogma on purgatory, then, teaches that the venial sins of those in purgatory and the punishment due to their sins can only be remitted by the pains of purgatory or by the prayers and other works of satisfaction of the faithful who have not died, as once men die they can no longer earn merit for themselves, they can no longer help themselves.

Even though God forgives the sins of the faithful who worthily confess, he, nevertheless, punishes them. This is known as the punishment due to sin. And each sin according to its kind incurs a just punishment:

“Nor bind sin to sin, for even in one thou shalt not be unpunished.” (Eccus. 7:8)

“For if the word spoken by angels became steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape [sin and its punishment] if we neglect so great salvation? which having begun to be declared by the Lord was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Heb. 2:2-3)

“For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” (Heb. 12:6)

Therefore, during the Old Testament era and now during the New Covenant era, God punishes all men and thus even the faithful when they sin. And even when sins are forgiven, God still punishes the sinner, such as when God punished King David even though his sins of adultery and murder were forgiven. The punishment due to sins that are forgiven is compared to a wound that remains after a disease (such a cancer) is cut out of the body. The disease (sin) is cured (forgiven), but the wound and body needs to heal. Hence the patient suffers pain, discomfort, and inconvenience until his wound and body are healed:

¹ RJMI's Briefs are Long Commentaries contained in the end of *The Catholic Bible*, revised by RJMI.

“The blueness of a wound shall wipe away evils [caused by sin] and stripes in the more inward parts of the belly.” (Prv. 20:30)

However, if sin is not forgiven (cut out), then the punishment due to the sin cannot be remitted.

Jesus’ sacrificial death made it possible for men’s sins the punishment due to their sins to be remitted. Hence, without his sacrificial death, men’s sins and the punishment due to their sins could never be remitted no matter how faithful they were or how many good works they did. But Jesus’ sacrificial death alone is not enough for sins and the punishment due to sins to be remitted or else all men would be saved no matter what they believe and no matter how obstinately evil they are. Therefore, men must do something, must cooperate with God’s grace, in order to have their sins and the punishment due to their sin remitted. And that first something during the New Covenant era is to believe in the Catholic faith and get baptised into the Catholic Church. Jesus said,

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” (Mk. 16:16)

Worthy baptisms remit not only all sins but also all the punishment due to sins. However, sins committed by the faithful after baptism can only be remitted by sincere confession. And if the sins are mortal, they must be confessed to a Catholic priest if one is available. Jesus gave the apostles and their priest successors the power to remit the sins of the faithful:

“When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” (Jn. 20:22-23)

If the faithful could no longer be guilty of sin and no longer incur the punishment due to sin after baptism, then this power would be meaningless and a lie. This is one proof that Jesus’ sacrificial death is not license for the faithful to sin and escape guilt and punishment. Therefore, if the faithful sin after they are baptised, they must worthily confess these sins to have them remitted. However, the punishment due to their sins will not be remitted as they were by baptism. The punishment due to sins that were committed after worthy baptism can only be remitted by prayer and other works of satisfaction or by worthy martyrdom. The reason is that by sinning after being worthily baptized is an affront to the sacrament and membership in the Catholic Church and the great benefits received by them. But God is still merciful and thus will remit the sins committed by the faithful when they worthily confess, but he will not remit the punishment due to their sins without prayer and other works of satisfaction or without worthy martyrdom, which is the ultimate work of satisfaction.

Therefore, the faithful whose sins are forgiven but die before they expiated all the punishment due to their sins go to purgatory to be purified, to have the punishment due to their sins purged by the fire of purgatory. St. Paul speak of this,

“For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.” (1 Cor. 3:11-15)

Catholic Commentary on 1 Cor. 3:12: “**Upon this foundation:** The foundation is Christ and his doctrine, or the true faith in him, working through charity. The building upon this foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones signifies the more perfect preaching and practice of the gospel; the wood, hay, and stubble, such preaching as that of the Corinthian teachers (who affected the pomp of words and

human eloquence) and such practice as is mixed with much imperfection and many lesser sins. Now the day of the Lord and his fiery trial (in the particular judgment immediately after death (Heb. 9:27)) shall make manifest of what sort every man's work has been, of which during this life it is hard to make a judgment. For then the fire of God's judgment shall try every man's work. And they whose works, like wood, hay, and stubble, cannot abide the fire shall suffer loss, these works being found to be of no value; yet they themselves, having built upon the right foundation (by living and dying in the true faith and in the state of grace, though with some imperfection), shall be saved yet so as by fire in purgatory, being liable to this punishment by reason of the wood, hay, and stubble which was mixed with their building."

The prayers and other works of satisfaction by the faithful who have not yet died can also expiate the punishment due to sins for the suffering souls in purgatory and thus lessen their time in purgatory. Hence several places in the Bible speak of the faithful offering up prayers and other works of satisfaction for their dead brethren so that God would remit their venial sins and/or the punishment due to their sins:

"And stretch out thy hand to the poor that thy expiation and thy blessing may be perfected. A gift hath grace in the sight of all the living, and restrain not grace from the dead." (Eccus. 7:36-37)

Catholic Commentary on Eccus. 7:37: "**And restrain not grace from the dead:** Withhold not from the dead in purgatory the benefit of alms, prayers, and sacrifices. Such was the doctrine and practice of the Church of God even in the time of the Old Testament; and the same has always been continued from the days of the apostles in the Church of the New Testament, the Catholic Church."

"It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins." (2 Mac. 12:46)

Catholic Commentary on 2 Mac. 12:46: "**It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead:** This upholds the Catholic dogma on purgatory. Here is an evident and undeniable proof, from the Old Law, of the practice of praying for the dead which was then strictly observed by the Jews. Consequently this practice could not have been introduced at that time by Judas, their chief and high priest, if it had not always been their custom."

"O Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, hear now the prayer of the dead of Israel, and of their children, that have sinned before thee, and have not hearkened to the voice of the Lord their God, wherefore evils have cleaved fast to us. Remember not the iniquities of our fathers, but think upon thy hand, and upon thy name at this time:" (Bar. 3:4-5)

And St. Paul says,

"And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then the Son also himself shall be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. Otherwise what shall they do that are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not again at all? why are they then baptized for them?" (1 Cor. 15:28-29)

Catholic Commentary on Cor. 15:29. "**Baptized for the dead:** To be baptized for the dead is to undertake self-denials, mortifications, and other works of satisfaction in order to help the poor souls in purgatory. Just as the pain and suffering that Catholic martyrs undergo, known as baptism of blood, expiates their venial sins and the punishment due to their sins, so likewise baptism for the dead, which can also be called baptism of afflictions and suffering offered for the poor souls in purgatory, helps the poor souls in purgatory have their venial sins and the punishment due to their sins remitted. Jesus referred to his passion and death as a baptism, a baptism of

suffering and death: 'I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?' (Lk. 12:50)"

If these dead men were completely pure and thus were in the Limbo of the Fathers during the Old Testament era or in Heaven during the New Covenant era, then there would be no need to pray for them. And if these dead men needed prayers, then they were lacking something they needed. And that something was the remission of venial sins and/or the punishment due to their sins.

The faithful, then, who die guilty of venial sins are saved but must go to purgatory to have their venial sins remitted. Jesus speaks of this when he said,

"And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but he that shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come." (Mt. 12:32)

Catholic Commentary on Mt. 12:32: "**Shall be forgiven:** From these words, St. Augustine (*City of God*, b. 21, c. 13) teaches that venial sins may be remitted in the world to come and that consequently there is a purgatory or a temporary middle place where Catholics in a state of grace go to have their venial sins and the punishment due to their sins remitted, at which point they can then enter heaven. St. Augustine says that these words would not be true if some sins were not forgiven in the world to come. Another Church Father says that we are to believe, from these words, in the existence of the fire of purgatory, to expiate our smaller offences, before the day of judgment."

Purgatory is also proved by the Traditions handed down from the original apostles that are not recorded in the Bible. From the time of the apostles, purgatory is proved by prayers that were offered for the dead in the Church's liturgies and other prayers, by inscriptions on tombs, by diptychs that speak of prayers being offered for the dead, and by testimonies of the Church Fathers. For example,

Apostolic Constitutions, 1st to 4th centuries: "Let us pray for those that are departed in the faith.² ...Let us pray for our brethren that are at rest in Christ, that God, the lover of mankind, who has received his soul, may forgive him every sin, voluntary and involuntary, and may be merciful and gracious to him and give him his lot in the land of the pious that are sent into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob [which is now in Heaven], with all those that have pleased him and done his will from the beginning of the world, whence all sorrow, grief, and lamentation are banished.³ ...Now, when you are invited to their memorials, do you feast with good order, and the fear of God, as disposed to intercede for those that are departed.⁴ ... These things we say concerning the pious; for as to the ungodly, if you give all the world to the poor, you will not benefit him at all. For to whom the Deity was an enemy while he was alive, it is certain it will be so also when he is departed.⁵"

Epitaph of Abercius, c. 190: "The citizen of a prominent city, I erected this while I lived, that I might have a resting place for my body. Abercius is my name, a disciple of the chaste Shepherd who feeds his sheep on the mountains and in the fields, who has great eyes surveying everywhere, who taught me the faithful writings of life. Standing by, I, Abercius, ordered this to be inscribed: Truly, I was in my seventy-second year. May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray for Abercius"

The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity, 202: "That very night, this was shown to me in a vision: I [Perpetua] saw Dinocrates going out from a gloomy place where

² b. 8, sec. 2, par. 13.

³ b. 8, sec. 4, par. 41

⁴ b.8, sec. 4, par. 44.

⁵ b. 8, sec. 4, par. 43

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”⁶

Heretic Tertullian, *The Crown*, 211: “We offer sacrifices for the dead on their birthday anniversaries.”⁷

Heretic Tertullian, *Monogamy*, 216: “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”⁸

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture 23, 4th century: “9. ...Then we pray for the holy fathers and bishops that are dead; and in short for all those who have departed this life in our communion; believing that the souls of those for whom prayers are offered receive very great relief, while this holy and tremendous victim lies upon the altar. 10. And I wish to persuade you by an illustration. For I know that many say, what is a soul profited which departs from this world either with sins or without sins, if it be commemorated in the prayer? For if a king were to banish certain who had given him offence, and then those who belong to them should weave a crown and offer it to him on behalf of those under punishment, would he not grant a remission of their penalties? In the same way we, when we offer to him our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, though they be sinners, weave no crown, but offer up Christ sacrificed for our sins, propitiating our merciful God for them as well as for ourselves.”⁹

St. Augustine, *Sermon 159*, 411: “1. There is an ecclesiastical discipline, as the faithful know, when the names of the martyrs are read aloud in that place at the altar of God, where prayer is not offered for them. Prayer, however, is offered for other dead who are remembered. It is wrong to pray for a martyr, to whose prayers we ought ourselves be commended.”

St. Augustine, *Sermon 172*, 411: “2. But by the prayers of the holy Church, and by the salvific sacrifice, and by the alms which are given for their spirits, there is no doubt that the dead are aided, that the Lord might deal more mercifully with them than their sins would deserve. The whole Church observes this practice which was handed down by the Fathers: that it prays for those who have died in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, when they are commemorated in their own place in the sacrifice itself; and the sacrifice is offered also in memory of them, on their behalf. If, then, works of mercy are celebrated for the sake of those who are being remembered, who would hesitate to recommend them, on whose behalf prayers to God are not offered in vain? It is not at all to be doubted that such prayers are of profit to the dead; but for such of them as lived before their death in a way that makes it possible for these things to be useful to them after death”

⁶ c. 2, par.3-4.

⁷ c 3.

⁸ c. 10.

⁹ PG, 33, cols. 1115-6.

St. Augustine, *City of God*, 419: “Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. But not all who suffer temporal punishments after death will come to eternal punishments, which are to follow after that judgment”¹⁰

St. Augustine, *On Faith, Hope, and Charity*, 421: “That there should be some fire even after this life is not incredible, and it can be inquired into and either be discovered or left hidden whether some of the faithful may be saved, some more slowly and some more quickly in the greater or lesser degree in which they loved the good things that perish, through a certain purgatorial fire.¹¹ ...The time which interposes between the death of a man and the final resurrection holds souls in hidden retreats, accordingly as each is deserving of rest or of hardship, in view of what it merited when it was living in the flesh. Nor can it be denied that the souls of the dead find relief through the piety of their friends and relatives who are still alive, when the Sacrifice of the Mediator [Mass] is offered for them, or when alms are given in the Church. But these things are of profit to those who, when they were alive, merited that they might afterward be able to be helped by these things. There is a certain manner of living, neither so good that there is no need of these helps after death, nor yet so wicked that these helps are of no avail after death.¹²”

Even though the Council of Lyons was invalid because it was confirmed by apostate antipopes, it, nevertheless, teaches the dogma on purgatory:

Invalid *First Council of Lyons*, 1245: “23. Finally, since Truth in the Gospel asserts that ‘if anyone shall utter blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, neither in this life nor in the future will it be forgiven him’ (Mt. 12:32), by this it is granted that certain sins of the present be understood which, however, are forgiven in the future life, and since the Apostle says that ‘fire will test the work of each one of what kind it is,’ and ‘if any man’s work burn, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire’ (1 Cor 3:13,15), and since these same Greeks truly and undoubtedly are said to believe and to affirm that the souls of those who after a penance has been received yet not performed, or who, without mortal sin yet die with venial and slight sin, can be cleansed after death and can be helped by the suffrages of the Church, we, since they say a place of purgation of this kind has not been indicated to them with a certain and proper name by their teachers, we indeed, calling it purgatory according to the traditions and authority of the Holy Fathers, wish that in the future it be called by that name in their area. For in that transitory fire certainly sins, though not criminal or capital, which before have not been remitted through penance but were small and minor sins, are cleansed, and these weigh heavily even after death.”¹³

For the glory of God; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Joseph, Ss. Joachim and Anne, St. John the Baptist, the other angels and saints; and for the salvation of men

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¹⁰ b. 21, c. 13.

¹¹ 18:69

¹² 29:109.

¹³ D. 456.