



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

PURGATORY

Behold The Truth

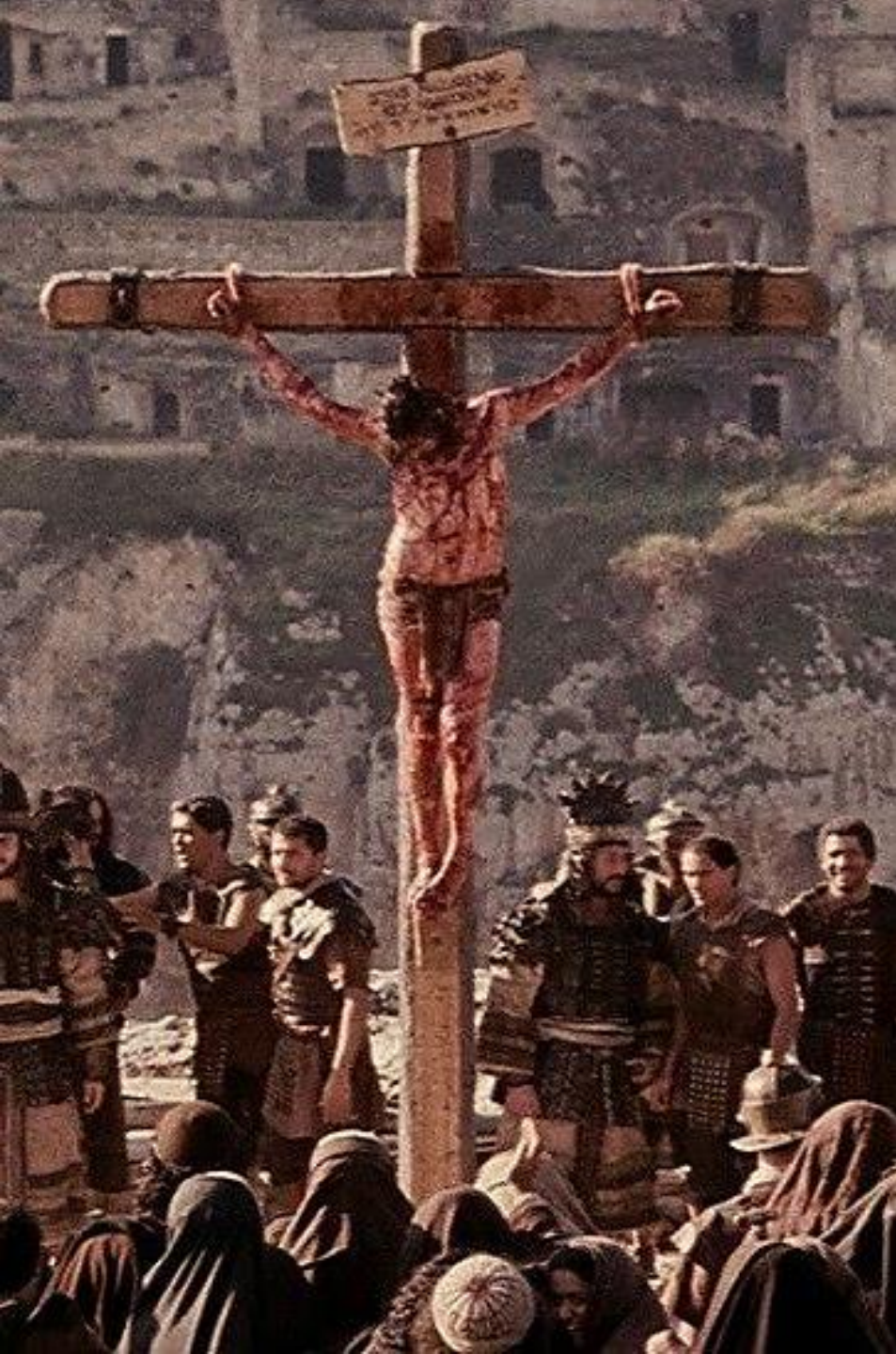
Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith
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What Is Purgatory?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “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.” pars. 1030-1031



Getting Purgatory Right

- ❖ Popular lore and the lingering memory of medieval abuses have forged a false image of Purgatory that can be hard to overcome.
- ❖ Purgatory, correctly understood, in no way undermines Christ's completed work on the Cross.
- ❖ By His death on the Cross, Jesus earned for us the grace of salvation.
- ❖ The doctrine of Purgatory helps to explain the process by which that grace is applied to us.



We Must Be Purified Before Entering Heaven

- ❖ We call the souls in Purgatory the “holy souls” because their sins have already been forgiven by the merits of Christ’s Cross, and they are destined for Heaven.
- ❖ However, the holy souls retain a certain attachment to their former sins from which they must be purified before entering heaven, for “nothing unclean shall enter it.” Rev. 21:27
- ❖ This purification is a fruit of the Cross.



Eternal & Temporal Debt

- ❖ To understand Purgatory, one needs to distinguish between the *eternal* and *temporal* debt of sin.
- ❖ The eternal debt of sin is Hell.
- ❖ When we repent of our sins and turn to Jesus we receive the forgiveness He earned for us and are released from the debt of Hell.
- ❖ Yet a temporal (or temporary) debt of sin often remains even after we have been forgiven.



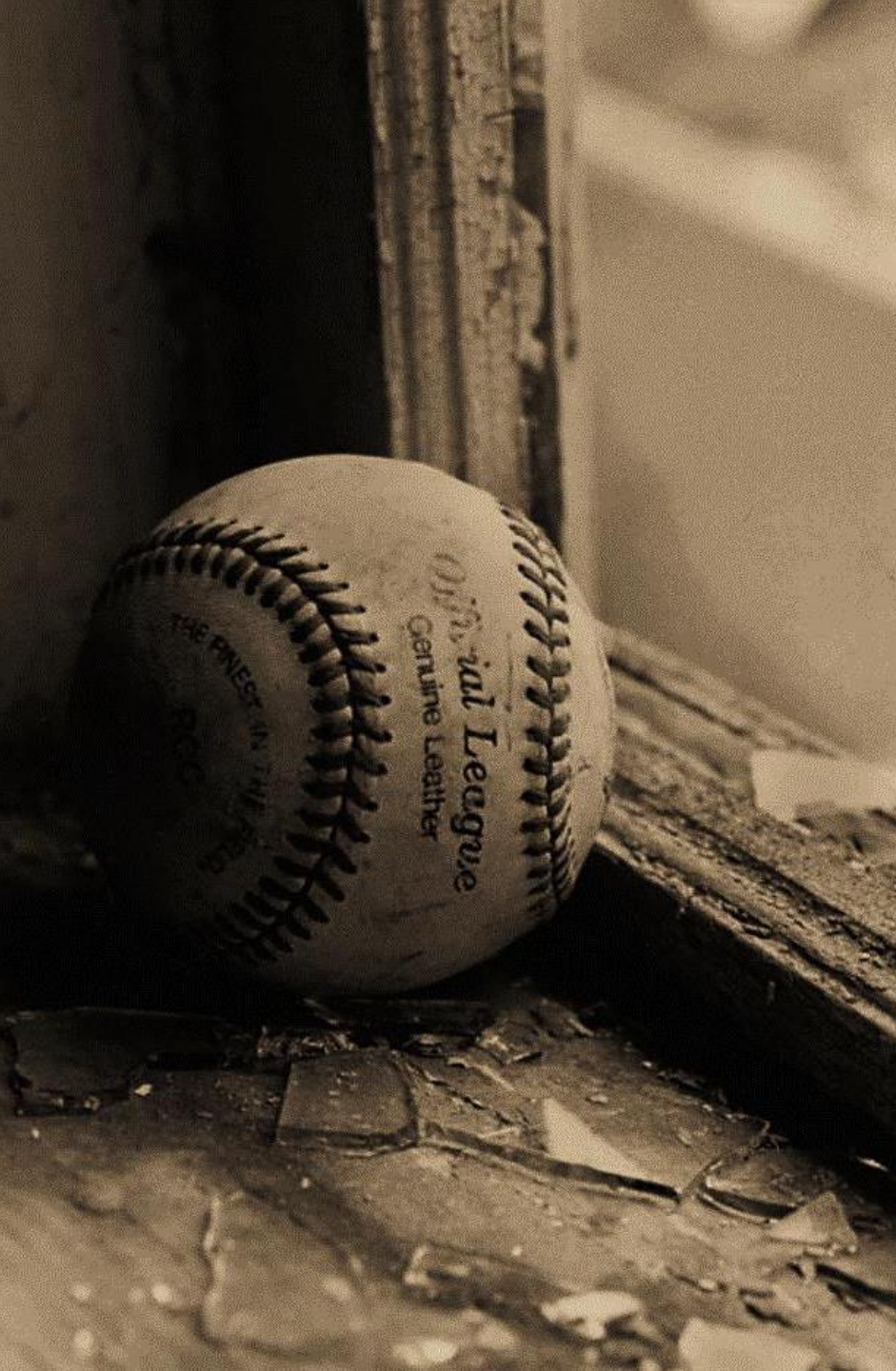
Eternal & Temporal Debt

- ❖ This temporal debt consists of the wounds our sins have caused in our relationship with God, with others, and within ourselves.
- ❖ God desires to heal us completely of this woundedness, which distorts our identity as His children and impedes our total union with Him.



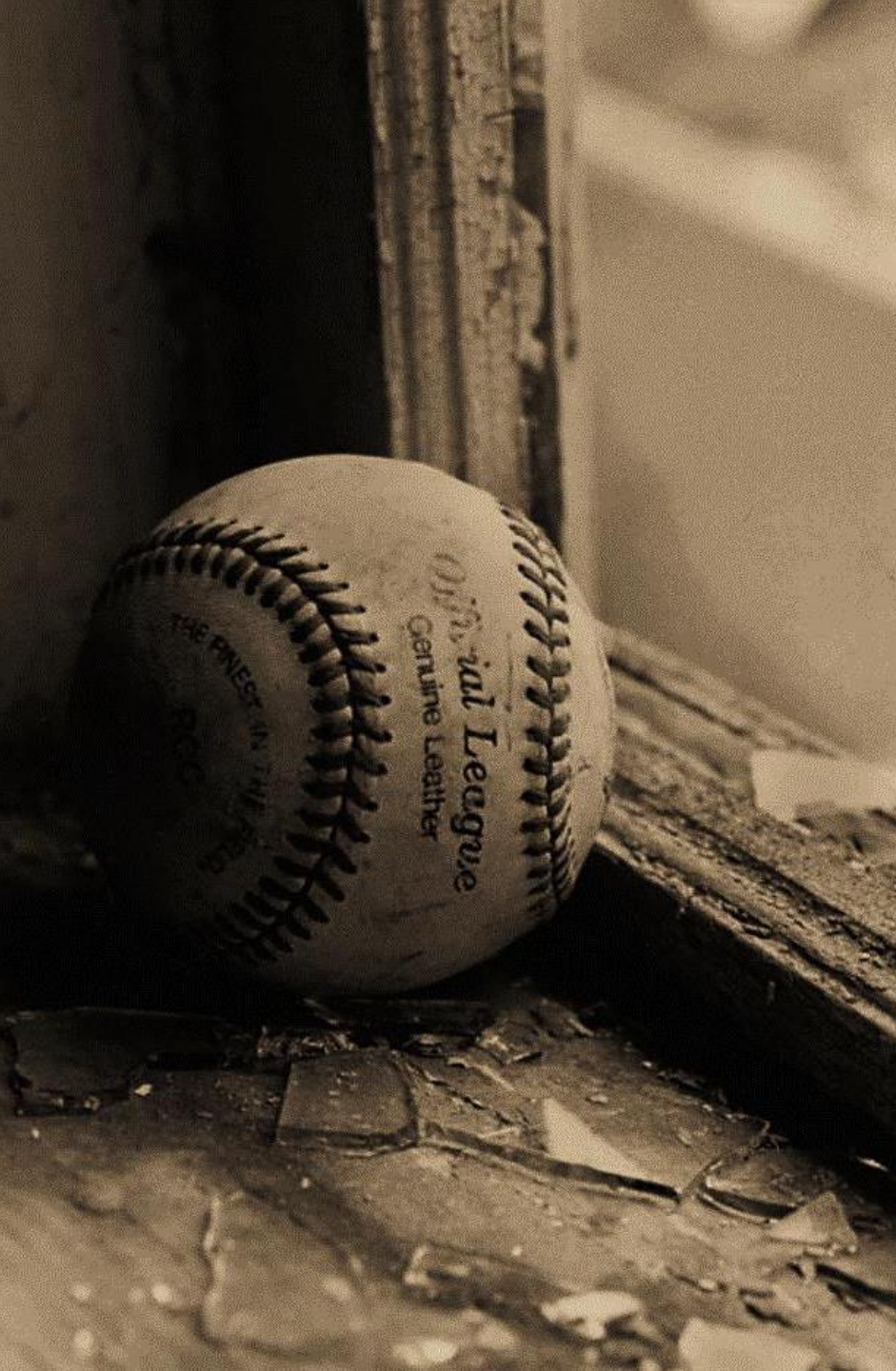
Eternal & Temporal Debt

- ❖ While Christ also earned the graces necessary to pay the temporal debt of our sins, He mysteriously invites us to participate with Him in the process of satisfying this debt.
- ❖ This is called making *reparation* for our sins.



The Need for Reparation

- ❖ To better understand the concept of reparation, we might consider the analogy of the boy who, playing baseball in the yard against his father's wishes, breaks the neighbor's window.
- ❖ Feeling remorse for having disobeyed his father, he goes to him and confesses what he has done.
- ❖ Out of love for him, his father forgives him.
- ❖ The father's forgiveness is free and unconditional.



The Need for Reparation

- ❖ Yet the harm caused by the boy's transgression, the broken window, remains and must be repaired.
- ❖ The father, moreover, desiring to foster virtue and a sense of responsibility in his son, sends him to the neighbor to offer an apology, and assigns him chores to help pay to fix the window.



Love Covers a Multitude of Sin

- ❖ By God’s grace, our works are meritorious in His sight when they are performed out of love, for “love covers a multitude of sins.”
1 Pet. 4:8; cf. Matt. 6:36, 17-18
- ❖ We may make full or partial reparation for our sins through prayer, fasting, charitable giving and other acts of kindness, and most especially by the penance the priest assigns us in Confession.
- ❖ If this process is incomplete at the time of death it will have to be completed in Purgatory.



Love Covers a Multitude of Sin

- ❖ Our works of reparation are like the boy's chores in the story.
- ❖ On their own they are meaningless.
- ❖ The boy could carry out those chores for a hundred years and the window would remain broken.



Love Covers a Multitude of Sin

- ❖ In reality, it is not the chores but the father's money that will fix the window.
- ❖ The father's money represents the Passion and death of Christ.
- ❖ Just as the boy's work would be futile apart from it, so the works that we do would be futile apart from the Cross.
- ❖ Yet joined to it, the essence of our works is transformed.



The Love of the Father

- ❖ The chores which the father assigns his son provide a means for him to restore trust between them, satisfy the neighbor's sense of justice, and heal the wounds within himself.
- ❖ The father does this because this is not just any boy from the neighborhood, but his own beloved son.



The Love of the Father

“And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?—‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him, for the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ Prov. 3:11-12 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ...



The Love of the Father

“Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Heb. 12:5-11



A Healing of All Wounds

- ❖ The doctrine of Purgatory reveals to us all the more fully the efficacy of God's grace and His ardent desire for His children to participate in His work—specifically, the work of reparation, the healing of our woundedness.
- ❖ God's desire for complete union with us calls to mind the words of Saint Augustine: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." *Confessions*



The Call to Holiness

- ❖ All of salvation history really comes down to God's call to His wayward children to return to Him.
- ❖ Due to our fall from grace, our coming to Him requires our *sanctification*—that is to say, we must be made holy as He is holy.
- ❖ Jesus speaks in parable of a servant being thrown out of the wedding feast because he is not wearing a wedding garment, a symbol of holiness.
Cf. Matt. 22:11-13



The Call to Holiness

- ❖ Paul informs the Corinthians that many in their assembly “are weak and ill, and some have died” because they have received the Eucharist in a state of sin. 1 Cor. 11:30
- ❖ “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Heb. 1:14; cf. 1 Thess. 4:7



The Call to Holiness

- ❖ The Bible indicates the process of sanctification, of being *made ready* for the wedding feast, may continue after death.
- ❖ “Whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven,” declares Jesus; “but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”
Matt. 12:31-32



The Call to Holiness

- ❖ This “speaking against the Holy Spirit” is final impenitence for one’s sins, the refusal to accept God’s mercy.
- ❖ Christ’s words seem to indicate, though, that a form of expiation for certain sins exists beyond the grave, or “in the age to come.”



Saved As Through Fire

- ❖ The most explicit biblical reference to Purgatory comes from Paul, who in *First Corinthians* presents two different scenarios by which believers shall enter Heaven.



Saved As Through Fire

- ❖ In the first scenario, a believer, having carried out perfect works on earth, enters into Heaven directly.
- ❖ In the second, a believer, having carried out imperfect works, must first pass through a purifying fire.



Saved As Through Fire

“Now if any one builds on the foundation [of Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones [i.e., perfect works], wood, hay, straw [i.e., imperfect works]—each man’s works will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation [of Christ] survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” 3:11-15



Being Made New Again

- ❖ Paul's description of a soul passing through a cleansing fire on the way to Heaven coincides with the Lord's revelation that some of His disciples will undergo varying degrees of temporal punishment in the afterlife for their failure to fully keep His commandments.
- ❖ "That servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating," He says. "But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating."
Luke 12:47-48; cf. Matt. 5:26



Being Made New Again

- ❖ While the thought of receiving a “beating” is disconcerting, Jesus is Love Incarnate and so His words must always be understood in the context of love.
- ❖ Discipline from the Lord needs to be distinguished from gratuitous punishment.
- ❖ The purpose of divine correction is never ultimately to hurt, but always to heal, strengthen, and restore.
- ❖ Discipline is God working to change us, making us new again.
Cf. Rev. 21:5

Prayers for the Dead

- ❖ Undoubtedly, the most controversial aspect of the Church's teaching on Purgatory is her practice of praying for the release of the souls there.
- ❖ All Christians understand that believers on earth are joined to one another through prayer.
Cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-3
- ❖ Like the soul itself, this prayer link survives death, for death is powerless "to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:38-39





Prayers for the Dead

- ❖ Our Lord declared that God “is not God of the dead, but of the living.”
Luke 20:38
- ❖ He Himself conversed with the long-deceased Elijah and Moses in the presence of the Apostles. Cf. Mark 9:3



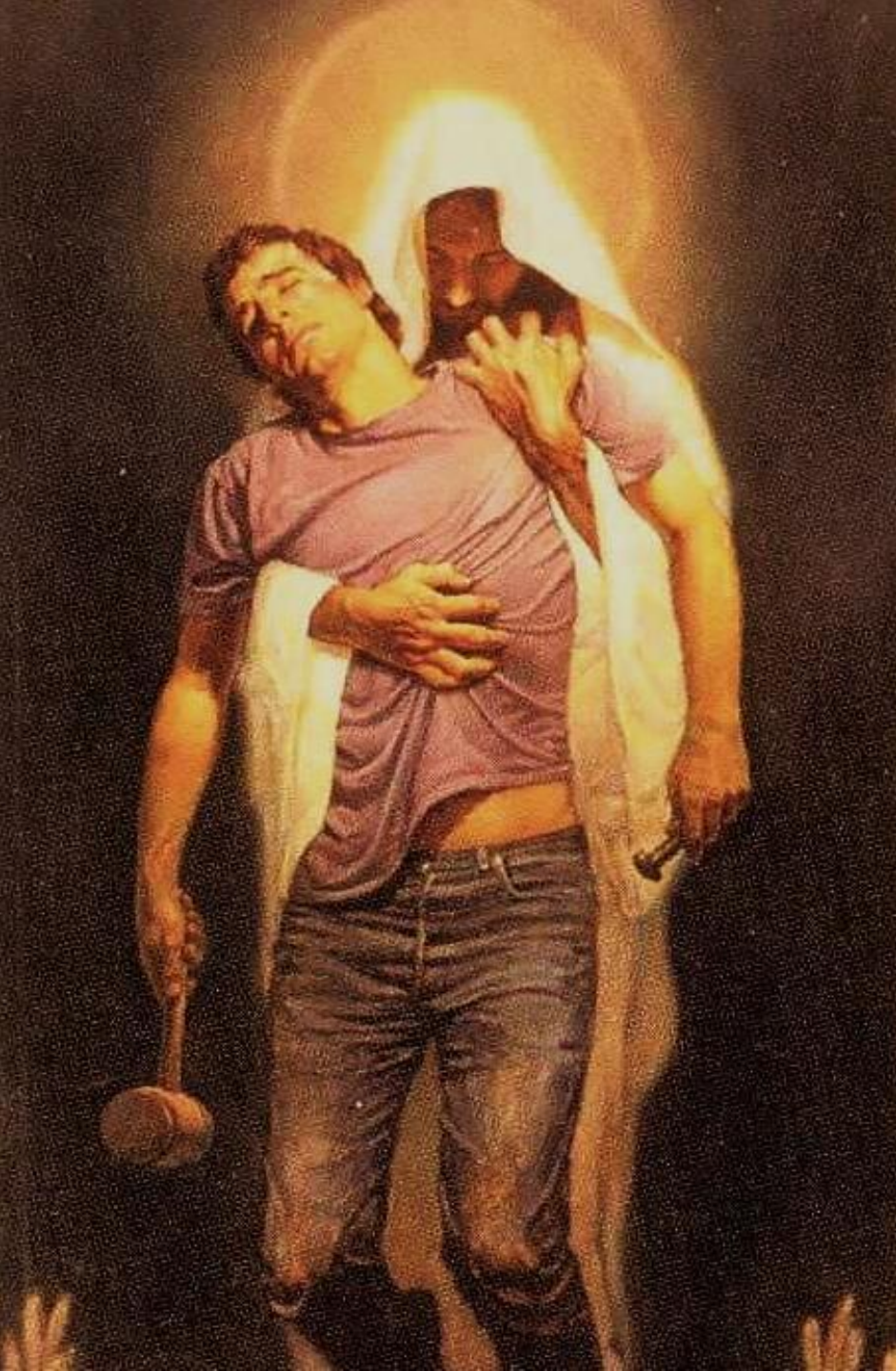
Prayers for the Dead

- ❖ Specifically concerning prayers for the dead, we see that David and his men “mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.” 2 Sam. 1:12
- ❖ Paul utters a prayer for the deceased Onesiphorus, saying, “May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day.” 2 Tim. 1:18



Prayers for the Dead

- ❖ The Church's practice of praying for the dead rests upon her belief that she has received from Christ, by virtue of the gift of the keys and power to bind and loose, the authority to grant or deny entry into the kingdom of heaven. Cf. Matt. 16:18-19
- ❖ He has given her the power to forgive sins in the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation; and to remit temporal punishments connected with sins through penance. Cf. Acts 2:38; John 20:23; 1 Pet. 4:8



Indulgences

- ❖ Likewise, through the granting of indulgences, the Church may remit temporal punishments that remain after death, hastening one's entry into Heaven.
- ❖ We are dealing here with the Catholic concept of *redemptive suffering*: that a believer may willingly join his sufferings to the sufferings of Christ for the spiritual welfare of himself and others. Cf. Col. 1:24



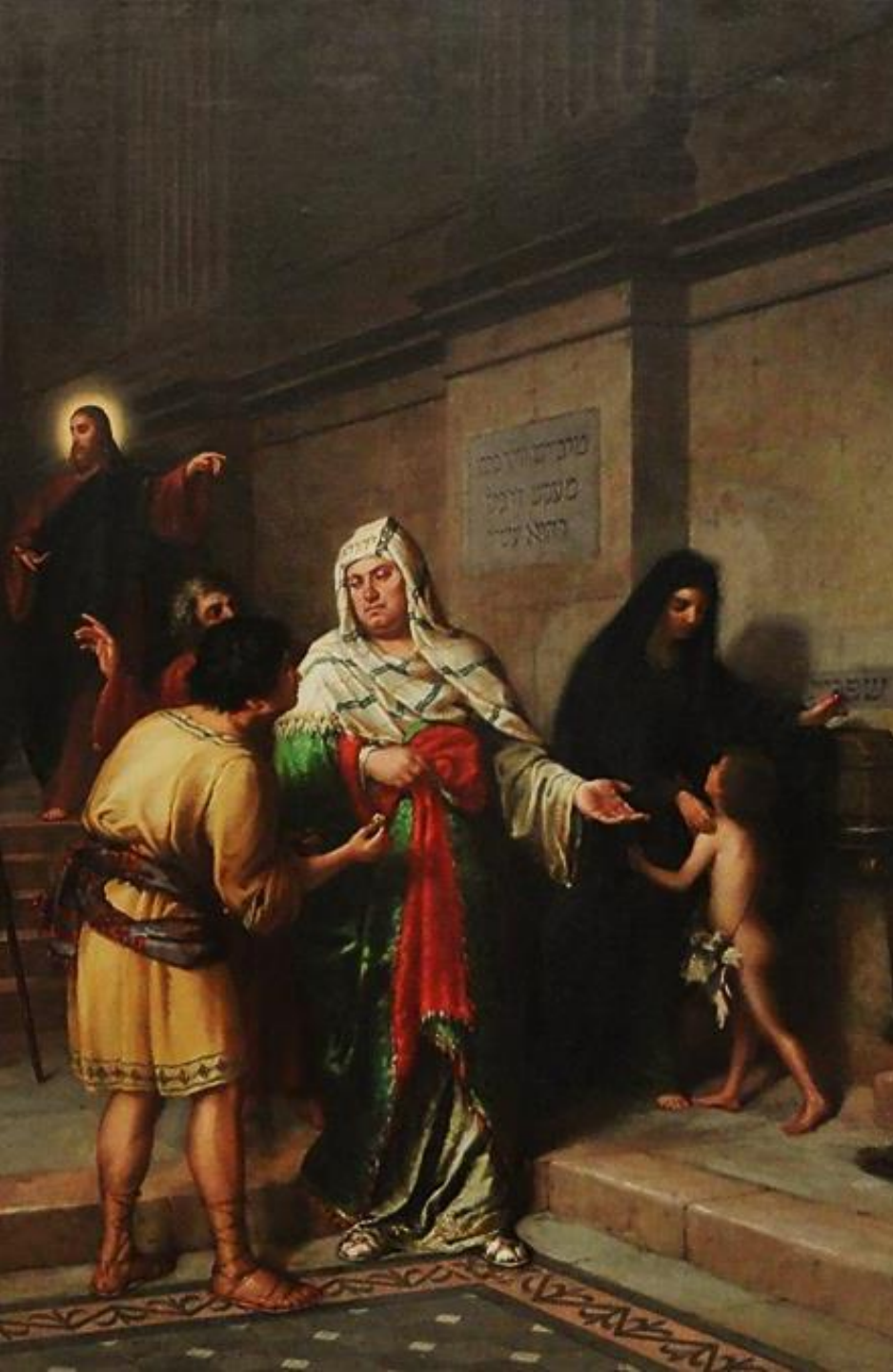
Indulgences

- ❖ The granting of indulgences came under fire with the irresponsible preaching of Johann Tetzel in Germany in the 16th century.
- ❖ Sent to promote Pope Leo X's indulgence to help finance the construction of the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome, Tetzel improperly presented the Church's teaching, leaving his hearers with the notion it was possible for them to buy entry into Heaven for their deceased loved ones.
- ❖ Tetzel's preaching was the catalyst that inspired Martin Luther's rebellion against the Church.



Indulgences

- ❖ Ironically, many of Luther's spiritual descendants in the non-Catholic assemblies of the present day strongly encourage tithing, giving ten percent of one's wealth to God, with the hope of receiving temporal blessings in return.
- ❖ In fact, this is the foundational premise of the popular Prosperity Gospel.



Indulgences

- ❖ The offering of a monetary sacrifice is certainly a biblical practice. Cf. Gen. 14:20
- ❖ Our Lord did not begrudge the poor widow, for instance, when she gave to the Temple “everything she had, her whole living.” Mark 12:44
- ❖ He praised her, in fact, because here sacrifice was offered with love.



Indulgences

- ❖ Likewise, He graciously received the costly jar of rare ointment with which the woman anointed Him.
- ❖ When the disciples protested, insisting the money from the sale of the ointment could have been used to feed the poor, Jesus rebuked them, saying, “She has done a beautiful thing to me.” Matt. 26:10
- ❖ Once again, it was not the act so much as the disposition of the woman’s heart that affected the Lord.



Indulgences

- ❖ Jesus further assured His followers that “whoever gives to one of these little ones a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” Matt. 10:42
- ❖ If one can receive merit from God for donating to the Temple, offering an expensive gift for the love of Jesus, and giving a drink to a thirsty disciple, cannot one also receive merit for contributing to the building fund of a basilica, provided the gift is given with a pure heart?



Indulgences

- ❖ The question regarding indulgences really has to do with the spirit in which the sacrifice is offered.
- ❖ True piety, driven by a charitable heart, is required to receive an indulgence—for it is by love that the soul is transformed and made ready for Heaven.
- ❖ Any work performed from a motive other than love is unacceptable to God.



Early Historical Evidence

- ❖ Among the historical evidence for belief in Purgatory are the inscriptions found at ancient Christian gravesites imploring prayers for the deceased.
- ❖ For example, the *Epitaph* of Saint Abercius Marcellus, the Bishop of Hieropolis, dating from about 190 A.D., reads: “Abercius is my name, a disciple of the chaste shepherd. ... May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray for Abercius.”



Early Historical Evidence

- ❖ In 203, Saint Vibia Perpetua, awaiting martyrdom in a dungeon in Carthage, recorded the details of a vision she received of her deceased brother, Dinocrates, in a temporary state of suffering.
- ❖ In her diary, she wrote: “And for him I began to make supplication, and to cry with groaning to the Lord.”



Early Historical Evidence

“Without delay, on that very night, this was shown to me in a vision. I 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 colour, and the wound on his face which he had when he died. ... For him I had made prayer, and between him and me there was a large interval, so that neither of us could approach to the other. ...



Early Historical Evidence

“And moreover, in the same place where Dinocrates was, there was a pool full of water, having its brink higher than was the stature of the boy; and Dinocrates raised himself up as if to drink. And I was grieved that, although that pool held water, still, on account of the height of its brink, he could not drink. And I was aroused, and knew that my brother was in suffering. But I trusted that my prayer would bring help to his suffering.”

Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity 2:3



Early Historical Evidence

- ❖ Shortly before her death, it was revealed to Perpetua that Dinocrates had benefitted from her prayers and entered into paradise.



Early Historical Evidence

“Then, on the day on which we remained in fetters, this was shown to me. I saw that that 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 where there had been a wound, I saw a scar; and that pool which I had before seen, *I saw now* with its margin lowered even to the boy’s navel. ...



Early Historical Evidence

“And one drew water from the pool incessantly, and upon its brink was a goblet filled with water; and Dinocrates drew near and began to drink from it, and the goblet did not fail. And when he was satisfied, 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.” Ibid. 2:4

A silhouette of a person kneeling in prayer, with their hands clasped in front of them, set against a warm, golden sunset background. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long shadows. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame, looking towards the right.

God's Infinite Love and Mercy

- ❖ The doctrine of Purgatory ushers us directly to the throne of grace, revealing to us the full depth and breadth of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, which removes the guilt of our sins, as well as the woundedness connected to them.
- ❖ Purgatory calls us to live, not as cowering servants, but nobly as God's sons and daughters joining in His work.
- ❖ In the end, Purgatory is about our full restoration in Christ, receiving from Him a healing as grace-filled and complete as the Divine Healer Himself.



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