

Praying for the Holy Souls in Purgatory: A Spiritual Work of Mercy

We, the members of the Church Militant on earth, have a sacred obligation to pray for our brothers and sisters who have died, members of the Church Suffering in purgatory. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us very specifically about the reality and necessity of this prayer. In paragraphs 1030-1032 we read:

All who died 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. 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.

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." (2 Maccabees 12:46) 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:

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

We see, then, that the Church, from its earliest days, indeed harkening back to its Jewish roots, has shown great solicitation and concern for those who have died. It is now our special duty and responsibility to pray and offer sacrifices for those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. Those whose souls are in purgatory depend upon our prayers for comfort and hope and anxiously await that time when they will enjoy eternal peace in heaven. It is the absolute truth that our prayers are efficacious and expedite their deliverance from their suffering. God does hear and answer our prayers for our deceased brothers and sisters.

