

9 Truths of Purgatory

What Catholics need to know about this doctrine of our Catholic Faith

Some fear it. Others hope for it. Some see it as proof of God's mercy; others as testimony to God's wrath. Many don't know anything about it, while many more have forgotten what they once knew. The "it" is purgatory, and when it comes to Catholic beliefs about the afterlife, the Church's teachings on purgatory have long been among its most misunderstood. Yet, despite the confusion, the teaching, being divinely revealed — part of the doctrine of the Faith — aren't all that complicated.

#1 – Purgatory exists: Modern Catholics don't know what Purgatory is anymore. It's become the "forgotten doctrine." Catholics have bought into the erroneous idea that sin has no consequences (especially if you don't get caught), that everyone goes to heaven because God is too nice to send anyone anywhere else. The Church's doctrine proclaims the opposite. Sin does have a consequence, eternal ones. And, while God is love, he is also just, and honors the free choices we make. Thus, the need for Purgatory. The final purification of those who die in friendship with God but who haven't fully broken their attachment to sin or atoned for wrongs done in this life.

#2 – Purgatory isn't a punishment: It is a merciful gift and a testimony to God's love. He doesn't want our suffering. The Lord forgives us immediately when we ask. The role of suffering is to undo the damage we've done. It's God the Healer applying the remedy to make us perfect images of Christ. God doesn't simply desire to save us from hell — from a state of eternal separation from him. He desires to save us from sin, from being anything less than the men and women he creates us to be. In Purgatory, we're no longer able to resist the healing we need, and he can finish the task he began during our lifetime.

#3 – The suffering endured by souls in Purgatory isn't physical pain: Through the centuries, artists striving to convey the sufferings of Purgatory have depicted men and women tormented by a burning fire. That there is fire in purgatory is not a clear teaching of the Church. The primary pain endured by those in Purgatory is the loss of the sight of God. To the extent that we are attached to our sin, becoming detached from it hurts. Yet, it is important to mention that the Church has not rejected the possibility of material fire in purgatory. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1030- 1032) refers to the fire and flames of purgatory twice, never indicating that these flames are metaphorical. Thus, the Church seems to feel bound to at least allow for the possibility

of a strictly literal interpretation of the purifying fire and uses the language of fire and of flames without any hint that this is meant metaphorically.

#4 – The souls in Purgatory experience joy, as well as pain: The souls in Purgatory suffer, but unlike the souls in hell, they suffer willingly. Purgatory isn't the outermost room of hell, but rather the anteroom of Heaven. Every soul in Purgatory is bound for glory. Their fate has been sealed, and ultimately, it is a blessed fate. Therefore, their time in Purgatory is marked not only by suffering, but also by joy.

#5 – Our prayers for the dead matter eternally: The souls in Purgatory may be bound for glory, but the process of purgation still can be long and painful. When the soul leaves the body, the time for merit is up. The soul is helpless. That's why they need our prayers — the Rosary, adoration, the Way of the Cross, and most of all, the Mass. Masses offered for the souls in Purgatory are the best thing we can do for our beloved dead. That's because the Mass is the highest form of prayer. How misguided people are, and without piety and devotion, who believe that the "human honor" and secular customs and "trappings" of burial are the most important thing. The prayers we pray for our loved ones throughout the entirety of our lives play a part in helping them enter into Heaven.

#6 – The Holy Souls intercede for us: The souls in Purgatory can't do anything for themselves, but the Church has long taught that they can do something for us: They can pray for us, helping obtain for us the grace we need to follow Christ more perfectly.

#7 – The Church's teaching on Purgatory are rooted in Scripture: Scriptural evidence for Purgatory can be found in the Second Book of Maccabees (12:45), where Judas Maccabee orders prayers and sacrifices for fallen soldiers who committed idolatry before their death. Saint Paul likewise hints at the cleansing fires of Purgatory when he writes, If any man's work is burned up he will suffer loss though he himself will be saved (1 Cor 3:12-15). He also prays for the soul of Onesiphorus in 2 Timothy 1:18. Revelation 21:27 says: No unclean thing will enter Heaven. Logic demands Purgatory. Without some process of purification after death, entrance into it would be even more difficult.

#8 – Purgatory wasn't an invention of the medieval Church: Although the doctrine wasn't officially defined until the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, the belief in a purgative state after death is as old as the Church itself, and is found in Scripture. Christians have always prayed for the dead. Even before the word Purgatory was used,

Christians recognized the need to offer up prayers and have masses said for those who have left this life. This witness begins with the Apostles, and is a consistent belief.

#9 – Purgatory is a “school” of holiness: Doing the suffering and sacrificing it takes to grow in holiness is easier on earth than it is in Purgatory. Our task is to become conformed to Christ. That’s a task we’re supposed to do here, and it’s a task for which we’re supposed to use our bodies. Purgatory is not supposed to be the norm. God gives each of us all the graces we need in this life to become saints. We need to make use of those graces now.

For more information view the DVD: *Purgatory: The Forgotten Church — Uncovering the Mystery, Meaning and Hope* by Friar John Clote.

November is the month of the Holy Souls. A time to intensify in our efforts to pray and offer sacrifice for our beloved dead, and for the forgotten dead. By making a concerted effort in this month dedicated to the Holy Souls, we form the discipline to pray for the dead every day of our lives here on earth, so that when our time comes, there is someone left to pray for us. Eternal rest, grant unto them, O Lord. And, let perpetual light shine on them, forever!

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