

V3_23rd_after_Pentecost= The Gratitude of the Souls in Purgatory towards their Benefactors
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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls
O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

Volume 3

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Gratitude of the Souls in Purgatory towards their Benefactors

“My daughter is even now dead.” St. Matthew 9: 18.

It is appointed for all men once to die; the one goes first, and the other follows, into a long eternity. My daughter died yesterday; my son is buried to day; my father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, friend, is dead! And what then? Weeping, moaning, and lamentation are to be heard in the house of death on the part of children, parents, and other friends and relatives that lasts for one, two, or three weeks, and then the departed is forgotten as if he had never lived. If he is sometimes remembered with a secret sigh, it is generally a useless sigh, a vain remembrance. Few there are who trouble themselves as to the lot of souls in the next world; and yet that should be the first thing to occupy our thoughts, that we may help them, if they are in Purgatory, with prayers, Masses, almsgiving, and other good works. To help the poor souls is a most excellent act of charity not only towards the departed, but also towards God Himself. Moreover that help is a work of charity even towards ourselves, because we can expect a hundredfold reward from the Poor Souls for the service we render them.

I. *We should be generous to the Poor Souls in Purgatory, on account of the great need in which they are;*

II. *On account of the advantage we ourselves shall derive therefrom.*

If I see another in extreme necessity, and can help him without any loss to myself and without much trouble, I am certainly bound to do so. This is the command of God, the law of charity, and even of the light of reason itself. So that he who omits a charitable work of that kind is looked on by all as guilty of the greatest cruelty. Who does not wonder at the cruelty of the Samaritan woman, who so long denied a drink of water to our Lord when He was thirsty and asked of her a drink, although she had a full pitcher of water by her and the whole well to draw from? Who is not indignant at the boorishness of Nabal, who so churlishly refused the humble request of David for a little food for himself and his followers? Who does not condemn the hardheartedness of the rich glutton who allowed the poor Lazarus to sit at his door amongst the dogs and refused him even the crumbs that fell from his table?

If Purgatory were nothing but a prison in which the Poor Souls are confined, and kept away from the sight of their Creator, could any bodily suffering be compared with theirs, when we consider the qualities

of those souls and all their circumstances? There is an old saying that no prison can be beautiful, even if it is your own room, or the hall of an imperial palace inlaid with gold; the mere fact of your being a prisoner takes away all the beauty of it. Chain up a dog that is accustomed to run loose, and see what he will do; how he howls and barks and runs to the length of his chain, and gnaws at the wood to which it is fastened, in the hope of getting free! Put a bird in a cage, and see how it flutters about, trying one wire after another with its beak, to see if there is any hole big enough to let it escape! Shut up a cat in a room, and it will clamber up the walls and run its head out of the window until it gets free. Wolves and other wild beasts have been known to gnaw off their foot when it was caught in a trap, in order to escape. If imprisonment is then such an intolerable thing for unreasoning animals, that are after all slaves by nature, and given over to us to use them as we please, what a torment must it not be for a rational being who is by nature free?

To be able to form some idea of that torment, imagine the great desire, and, at the same time, the inexpressible grief of a father, who, returning after a long voyage, full of the hope of seeing again his dear wife and children and friends, from whom he has been absent for years, finds that on his arrival in harbor he is kept in quarantine for six months, because he has come from a country that is infected with a plague; and there he has to remain shut up all that time, without being allowed to see any one from outside. What do you think would be the poor man's feelings under those circumstances? To be in his own country, in his own town, so near his loved ones, and yet unable to see them; how long must not the hours of his imprisonment seem to him? How he counts the months, the weeks, the days that have to elapse before he is set at liberty!

Again, imagine one who has been chosen as the bride of a great king, and who is on her way to join her beloved spouse, but is taken prisoner by her enemies and kept in close confinement. What desires and wishes she must form for freedom; what longings that do violence to the human mind and cause the utmost torment she must constantly feel! Yet almost infinitely greater is the torment of a soul in Purgatory, that sighs with the most ardent longings for the sight of its God, and yet has to sigh in vain. Scepters, crowns, and all that is glorious or great on earth; created beauty and every thing in the world that can attract our love; ah, what are ye all in comparison with the supreme and most beautiful of all goods, God Himself? Painful desires and longings of one creature for another, ah, what are ye in comparison with the yearnings of a soul that is already close to God by its full knowledge, and yet is kept in prison, unable to see its beloved God, its promised bridegroom? It seems to me that I hear such a soul crying out from Purgatory in the words of the Psalmist: "My tears have been my bread day and night: whilst it is said to me daily: where is thy God?" (Ps. 41: 4) This sad thought is always before my mind: where is thy God? thy last end? the center and fulfillment of all thy happiness? Where is He? Did not all my efforts on earth tend solely to possessing Him for all eternity? "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?" (Ps. 41: 3) When will that longed-for moment arrive when I shall be freed from this prison? How many years have I spent here already? How many days, months, years will have to elapse during which I shall still be deprived of the possession of my God? "Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged!" (Ps. 119: 5.) Fearful is the duration of my imprisonment! Is there no one to stretch out a helping hand to me? No one to open a door of escape for me?

We pity poor prisoners on earth, although they are generally criminals, murderers, and thieves. Our hearts, if they are not of stone or iron, would melt to see them confined in gloomy dungeons, behind iron bars, pallid, half-naked, lying on straw, covered with filth and vermin; and to console them a little in their sad state, we send them food and clothing. Should not the same pity influence us with regard to the Poor Souls, who are servants and dear friends of God, and are confined in a far more painful prison? The former are indeed deserving of compassion, although their only punishment, so far, is that they have to remain in prison until their sentence is pronounced; but the latter are kept away from the God whom they so long and desire to possess, and have to suffer in the fire of Purgatory.

Ah, that one word, fire, is sufficient to give us an idea of their torments. If no soul were confined in it longer than one day or a few hours, it would still be a place of terrible torments. What can be more

terrible, more horrifying, than the idea of burning for such a long time? Go and look at a furnace in which iron is melted; imagine that you are about to be cast into it alive; your flesh creeps at the bare thought! Think of the gridiron, on which St. Lawrence was roasted over a slow fire for some hours; could you bear that torment for even half an hour? Your blood runs cold at the mere thought of it! Oh, no, you could not bear it! And meanwhile, what have you been considering? That which is nothing more than a painted fire, compared to that in which the Poor Souls are burning. What? A painted fire? Yes, and do you wish to know why?

In the first place, the more fire is confined, the less air it has, the greater also is its force and violence; it works far more powerfully in a confined space than in the open air. When a handful of powder is ignited in a mortar, the small flame that comes from it drives the heavy iron shell high into the air as if it was a child's ball, and shatters with it everything it comes across, as with a thunderbolt. The strongest walls, towers, mountains, and rocks are blown up by subterranean mines. Imagine now the force of that fire which is confined in the middle of the earth, where not the least breath of air can reach it, and how it rages and roars against the Poor Souls! In the second place, an instrument does more or less work according as the hand that wields it is stronger or weaker. Give a child a rod and let him beat you with it; you can bear twenty blows from him without feeling pain; but if a strong man beats you with the same rod, he will cause the blood to spurt out from your hand in a few moments. What is the fire that men can enkindle for their uses on earth? It is a rod or a sword, but it is, so to speak, placed in the hand of a weak child; that is, it is an element which cannot produce any effect beyond its own natural powers. But the fire of Purgatory is an instrument raised above its nature by the mighty arm of God's justice, which, as it is all-powerful, gives it, as it were, an infinite increase of intensity. Therefore, according to the opinions of the holy Fathers, it comprises all imaginable torments that men can suffer. "This fire," says St. Augustine, "although it is not eternal, exceeds all the pains that any one ever suffered on this earth." "The least pain of Purgatory," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "exceeds the greatest of this life." "Nay," exclaims St. Gregory, "take away the blasphemies, the despair, and the eternity from hell, and you will not be able to distinguish between the condition of a lost soul in hell and a soul in purgatory; because the fire in which the elect are purified is one and the same with that in which the damned are tormented." The Church, too, prays for the departed in the following terms

"Deliver the souls of the faithful departed from the pains of hell."

In this terrible fiery prison the Poor Souls are confined for weeks, months, years, for twenty, fifty, a hundred years, or even longer, and since they cannot help themselves, they keep crying out to us: Have pity on me! Have pity on me! Give me even one Communion, one Mass, one rosary, one act of mortification, even one good work of the many you perform every day! What you thus bestow on me will be of the greatest help in lessening my torments and shortening the time of my imprisonment. Ah, have pity on me! "But," continues St. Augustine, "there are few who make any response to the appeal!" O my brethren, how cruel that is! The sick man calls from his bed, and there is some one to bring him medicines and to comfort him; a dog howls at the door and there is some one to open it for him; an animal falls into a pit and it is helped out, "but the faithful soul cries out in its torments, and no one heeds it." What cruelty on the part of reasoning beings! Do you not hear them crying out: Father, mother, have pity on me! Son, daughter, have pity on me! Husband, wife, have pity on me! Brothers, sisters, friends, relatives, have pity on me! Should not the sight of such sorrow and suffering move us to shed tears of compassion? Yet such are in reality the cries sent forth by those Poor Souls, although we cannot hear them with our bodily ears. How cruel it is to pay no attention to them, to make no effort to help them, especially since we can do so easily by applying to their advantage a share of our daily actions, to their great relief and without the least loss or additional trouble to ourselves! But why do I say without loss? It is rather of the greatest advantage to us to help the Poor Souls, and therefore we are still less to be excused if we refuse to show them mercy.

II. Although the blind heathens thought that the souls of men die with their bodies as if they were dumb beasts, so that they could not hope for any return or advantage from them; yet they were wont to show the greatest honor to the memory of the departed. Millions of money were spent in building splendid monuments and mousoleums to keep fresh the memory of the dead. What would they have done if they had believed that their souls were immortal and destined to live in a far happier country, where they could make a rich return for all the honor and generosity shown them, as our faith teaches us? Oh, what a great interest is brought in to us by the small capital we expend for them? What graces and favors we owe to the few works of devotion that we perform during our lives for the relief of the Poor Souls! As time does not permit it, I will say nothing now of the benefit we have to expect from the souls themselves whom we help; for it is certain that since they are friends of God and in full conformity with his will, although they are in torments and cannot help themselves, yet they can pray to God for others. If these souls are so powerful while still in prison, how much more will they not be able to do for us when by our good works they shall be freed from their sufferings and be enabled to enter heaven?

Will the God of infinite fidelity and generosity allow our charity and mercy to go un-rewarded? Was it then merely to deceive us that He said: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy"? (St. Matthew 5: 7.) Is there no meaning in that magnificent promise of his: "Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again" (St. Luke 6: 38), especially as our Lord says that what we do to the least of his brethren He will take as having been done to Himself? What help and grace may we not expect from that mercy in the hour when we are most in need, the hour of death? Are we not expressly assured of this: "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the evil day"? (Ps. 40: 2) that is, in the dangerous hour of death the Lord will take care of him and free him from the hands of his enemies. Then he will be helped by those souls, far more faithful to him than his friends and relatives, and his deathbed will be surrounded by those whom he either freed from Purgatory or relieved therein, and who will now bring him heavenly help and consolation in return.

"Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity; that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings" (St. Luke 16: 9). There have been some who, when at the point of death, saw souls standing round them like an army defending them from the attacks of the devil and ready to accompany them into heaven. What help and grace may not be expected as the reward of this mercy after death, if one has to spend some time in Purgatory to pay off his own debts! Oh, if I had the happiness to free even one soul from that prison, and that I had to go there myself after death, would that now happy soul look on with indifference, while I, its benefactor and the promoter of its happiness, languish in torments with the severity of which it is well acquainted? Would it not intercede with God for my speedy liberation? And with what confidence could I not look to that soul and say as Joseph did when the butler was released from the Egyptian prison: "Only remember me when it shall be well with thee, and do me this kindness: to put Pharaoh in mind to take me out of this prison" (Gen. 40: 14). Remember me, I might say; think of me, blessed soul! A year or two ago I brought you liberty; do not forget me who have to suffer as you had then! Remember me now when it is well with you; intercede for me with God, with whom you can do all things, and beg of Him to free me from this prison.

Remember how it was with you when you were there; how you longed for the moment of your liberation to come: it was I who helped you thereto; show now the same mercy to me, so that by your assistance I may soon come to heaven and rejoice with you. The butler forgot Joseph for a long time, but we may be certain that such a soul, which clearly sees in the beatific vision all the prayers that are addressed to it, will not long remain insensible to them.

And again, I often ask myself if it is possible for one to be lost forever who tries to bring others to heaven? Is it possible for a Christian to be damned who makes every effort to free souls from Purgatory? No; God is too good and faithful not to show mercy to him who has been merciful. Otherwise why should

He at once invite into His kingdom those who fed Him, gave Him to drink, freed Him from prison, visited and consoled Him in sickness, if He should condemn to hell the Christian who renders Him all those services in the persons of the Poor Souls? No, I say again; the poor souls themselves would not allow that. If their benefactor was at the last gasp in the state of sin, and in danger of being sent to hell for all eternity, they would unanimously cry out to God for a powerful grace of repentance for him, saying like the Jewish people when Jonathan's life was in danger after he had routed the Philistines, on account of his having eaten a little honey against his father's command: "Shall Jonathan then die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?" (I Kings 14: 45.) Shall he perish who saved us from the hands of our enemies? No, we cannot allow that; not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground. What? those souls would cry out; shall he, O good God, be condemned to hell forever who has shown us such great charity? It is to him we owe it that we are freed so soon from our torments and have come to enjoy eternal rest with Thee; and must he now be among the reprobate? Ah, be merciful to him according to Thy promise, for he has been merciful to us.

Let us make trial of this, my dear brethren, and by frequent works of mercy make friends of the departed; and we shall find that we have not lost, but gained, by our trouble. There have been many, I know there are some still, who keep nothing for themselves, but give all their satisfactory works to the Poor Souls, and in my opinion they themselves are the gainers thereby. If we do not wish to be so generous, then let us at least give a part of our satisfactory works to the Poor Souls every day; this is an alms that the most needy beggar can bestow as well as the richest lord. Amen.

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