

~From the Administrator~

Dear Parish Family,

February 21, 2010

Here we are already in Lent! Bishop Cistone's Lenten Message for 2010 is on-line at the Diocese of Saginaw web page: <http://www.saginaw.org>

You may have noticed that our Stations of the Cross are now mounted on some very beautiful wood frames that are shaped like the windows at the back of church in the choir loft. A great big THANK YOU to Dave Faber who built the frames, and Carol Matthews who covered the backs in violet cloth. Also, THANK YOU to all the people who took care of the decorating in the church building and the gathering area.

For Lent, we will be having Eucharistic Adoration on Thursday mornings from roughly 9:00am until Noon. People are needed to take half-hour adoration slots on Thursday mornings. You are invited to sign-up on the schedule found on the bulletin board in the gathering area.

We are also continuing the video program *Lord Have Mercy* on Tuesday and Friday mornings.

Starting this week on Thursday at 5:30pm we will have our Soup Supper, followed by Stations of the Cross in the church at 7:00pm.

Our Lenten reflections on the suffering and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ can lead us to consider praying for the Poor Souls in Purgatory. There is a brief article on the back of this week's letter on Purgatory. One laudable practice is to apply a plenary indulgence for the Poor Souls.

A plenary indulgence is the remission of the entire temporal punishment due to sin so that no further expiation is required in Purgatory. A partial indulgence commutes only a certain portion of the penalty. An indulgence is not permission to commit sin, nor a pardon of future sin.

A plenary indulgence can be obtained by doing any one of the following:

1. Piously reading Sacred Scripture (the Bible) for at least 30 minutes.
2. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least half an hour.
3. The pious exercise of the Stations of the Cross.
4. Recitation of the Rosary in a church or as a family.

During this Year for Priests, a plenary indulgence may also be obtained by attending Mass and offering prayers to Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest for the priests of the Church.

In addition to the any of the prescribed actions named above, the individual must have gone to Confession, received Holy Communion, and offered prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father.

Please continue to pray for each other! God bless you! See you at school or at church!

Fr. David

Watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ. Rest your weary ones. Bless your dying ones. Soothe your suffering ones. Pity your afflicted ones. Shield your joyous ones. And for all your love's sake. Amen.

— *St. Augustine*

What Ever Happened to Purgatory?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030). It notes that "this final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031).

The purification is necessary because, as Scripture teaches, nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven (Rev. 21:27) and, while we may die with our mortal sins forgiven, there can still be many impurities in us, specifically venial sins and the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven.

Two Judgments

When we die, we undergo what is called the particular, or individual, judgment. Scripture says that "it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27). We are judged instantly and receive our reward, for good or ill. We know at once what our final destiny will be. At the end of time, when Jesus returns, there will come the general judgment to which the Bible refers, for example, in Matthew 25:31-32: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." In this general judgment all our sins will be publicly revealed (Luke 12:2-5).

Augustine said, in *The City of God*, that "temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before that last and strictest judgment" (21:13). It is between the particular and general judgments, then, that the soul is purified of the remaining consequences of sin: "I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper" (Luke 12:59).

Purgatory in Scripture

Christ refers to the sinner who "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32), suggesting that one can be freed after death of the consequences of one's sins. Similarly, Paul tells us that, when we are judged, each man's work will be tried. And what happens if a righteous man's work fails the test? "He will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor 3:15). Now this loss, this penalty, can't refer to consignment to hell, since no one is saved there; and heaven can't be meant, since there is no suffering ("fire") there. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory alone explains this passage.

Then, of course, there is the Bible's approval of prayers for the dead: "In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the dead to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin" (2 Macc. 12:43-45). Prayers are not needed by those in heaven, and no one can help those in hell. That means some people must be in a third condition, at least temporarily. This

verse so clearly illustrates the existence of purgatory that, at the time of the Reformation, Protestants had to cut the books of the Maccabees out of their Bibles in order to avoid accepting the doctrine.

Prayers for the dead and the consequent doctrine of purgatory have been part of the true religion since before the time of Christ. Not only can we show it was practiced by the Jews of the time of the Maccabees, but it has even been retained by Orthodox Jews today, who recite a prayer known as the Mourner's Kaddish for eleven months after the death of a loved one so that the loved one may be purified. It was not the Catholic Church that added the doctrine of purgatory. Rather, any change in the original teaching has taken place in the Protestant churches, which rejected a doctrine that had always been believed by Jews and Christians.

Why Go To Purgatory?

Why would anyone go to purgatory? To be cleansed, for "nothing unclean shall enter [heaven]" (Rev. 21:27). Anyone who has not been completely freed of sin and its effects is, to some extent, "unclean." Through repentance he may have gained the grace needed to be worthy of heaven, which is to say, he has been forgiven and his soul is spiritually alive. But that's not sufficient for gaining entrance into heaven. He needs to be cleansed completely.

It is entirely correct to say that Christ accomplished all of our salvation for us on the cross. But that does not settle the question of how this redemption is applied to us. Scripture reveals that it is applied to us over the course of time through, among other things, the process of sanctification through which the Christian is made holy. Sanctification involves suffering (Rom. 5:3-5), and purgatory is the final stage of sanctification that some of us need to undergo before we enter heaven. Purgatory is the final phase of Christ's applying to us the purifying redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross.

Nothing Unclean

Purgatory makes sense because there is a requirement that a soul not just be declared to be clean, but actually be clean, before a man may enter into eternal life. After all, if a guilty soul is merely "covered," if its sinful state still exists but is officially ignored, then it is still a guilty soul. It is still unclean.

Catholic theology takes seriously the notion that "nothing unclean shall enter heaven." From this it is inferred that a less than cleansed soul, even if "covered," remains a dirty soul and isn't fit for heaven. It needs to be cleansed or "purged" of its remaining imperfections. The cleansing occurs in purgatory. Indeed, the necessity of the purging is taught in other passages of Scripture, such as 2 Thessalonians 2:13, which declares that God chose us "to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit." Sanctification is thus not an option, something that may or may not happen before one gets into heaven. It is an absolute requirement, as Hebrews 12:14 states that we must strive "for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

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