

participation. St. Paul does not mean that the sufferings of Christ are defective. “There is no *want* [or deficiency] in the sufferings of Christ in Himself as *Head*: but many sufferings are still *wanting*, or are still to come in His body, the Church, and His members, the faithful.” (Douay Rheims Bible, fn. Col. 1:24) We can offer our sufferings for each other and for the souls in purgatory. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.” (2 Cor. 12:15) Pope Pius XII said, in the encyclical quoted above: “The salvation of many souls depends upon the prayers and voluntary mortifications offered for that intention by the members of the Mystical Body of Christ.” (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 316) He exhorted the faithful when he said: “Let our common pleading rise daily to heaven for all the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ.” (Ibid., p. 316) In other words, we can really help each other by our prayers and sacrifices.

But not only can we help others save their souls, and not only can the saints in heaven help us save ours, it is also true that we on earth have the power to help the souls in purgatory. It is a dogma of the Catholic faith that “The living faithful can come to the assistance of the souls in purgatory by their intercessions.” (Ibid., p. 321) That is, we can help the souls in purgatory by our intercessory prayer, by gaining indulgences for them, by alms offered for them, by pious works and, above all, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. According to the Second Book of Machabees, it is clear that “There existed in late Judaism the conviction that those who had died in sin could be helped by prayer and sacrifice of atonement.” (Ibid., p. 321) The sin of course would be venial sin, for if someone dies in mortal sin, he is lost forever. Thus, we are able to offer our prayers and good works for the souls in purgatory, “...in substitution for the temporal punishments for sins, which the poor souls still have to render.” (Ibid., p. 322)

As Catholics, we believe in the the existence of purgatory. It is a dogma of faith that, “The souls of the just which, in the moment of death, are burdened with venial sins or temporal punishment due to sins,” are punished. (Ibid., p. 480) The existence of purgatory is a fact. Purgatory is as real as heaven and hell. We also believe in the Communion of Saints. We believe—

because it is an article of faith—that we can help the souls in purgatory. “The Council of Trent declared against the [Protestant] Reformers, who rejected the fires of purgatory, that there is a cleansing fire [in purgatory], and that the souls held fast in it receive help through the intercessory prayers of the faithful, above all by the Sacrifice of the Altar, which is pleasing to God...” (Ibid., p. 321)

How many souls are there languishing in purgatory waiting for us to pray for them! How many relatives we have there, who wait on our prayers and good works to free them! There are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, grandparents and children who suffer in the fires of purgatory, waiting for us. Do you pray for the faithful departed? They do suffer greatly.

The reason there is a purgatory stems from the holiness of God and the justice of God. The holiness of God requires that only souls that are perfectly purified enter Heaven. In the Apocalypse we read: “There shall not enter into it [i.e., heaven] any thing defiled...” (Apoc. 21:27) The justice of God demands that temporal punishment for sin be atoned for. There are two kinds of punishment. There is eternal punishment and there is temporal punishment. The eternal punishment is taken away by baptism and the sacrament of penance, but all temporal punishment is not necessarily taken away by the latter. “[T]he temporal punishments of sin remain after the forgiveness of the guilt of sin.” (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 480) Divine justice requires that such temporal punishment be satisfied, either in this life or in the next. If the temporal punishments for sin have not been paid in this life by prayers, sacrifices, good works, and the gaining of indulgences, then they will be paid in the next life in purgatory.

Because of the Communion of Saints, we are able to come to the assistance of the Holy Souls in purgatory. Do not neglect them. A day should not pass during which you do not pray for the faithful departed, and especially for relatives and friends and for those who have no one to pray for them. Pray, in the words of the Postcommunion from the Mass on All Souls Day: “May the prayer of Thy suppliant people, O Lord, benefit the souls of Thy servants, that Thou mayest deliver them from all their sins, and make them partakers of Thy redemption. Amen.”