

During the month of November, many of our readings from Scripture during Mass focus on the so-called “Last Things”. Also during this month, we pray especially for all the faithful departed, those in Purgatory, that they may soon enter into the presence of God. Below are a couple of articles on the “Last Things” and “Purgatory”.

### **Summary of Doctrine on the Last Things**

The last things are death, judgment, heaven and hell.

*Death* is the separation of man's mortal body and immortal soul. It comes to all men as a result of original sin. It is a temporary state, for at the end of the world, all men shall rise again to be judged by Christ. Thus the whole man, body and soul, will be rewarded for the good or evil that he has done, body and soul, in this life.

At the moment of death, each human person is *judged* by God based on his conduct in this life, and goes immediately to his reward or punishment. Moreover, at the end of the world, Jesus Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. At that time, God's whole plan for the world shall be revealed, and his mercy and justice demonstrated.

*Heaven* is the eternal state of perfect happiness resulting from the face to face vision of God, which is the reward of those who have served Him in this life.

*Hell* is the eternal state of torment and despair which awaits those who, in this life, have freely rejected God and the happiness which He offers.

Before the end of the world, there will be an intermediate state called *purgatory*. There, those who are bound for heaven, but whose love for God is still marred by some imperfection, undergo a temporary period of purifying suffering. When this purification is complete, they are fit to enter God's presence and are admitted to the joys of heaven.

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### **Purgatory**

Mere reason suggests there must be a Purgatory. So many people seem to be good, but not so greatly good that they should be fit for heaven at once. Again, not nearly all are so evil as to deserve hell. So there should be a means of purification and paying the debt of temporal punishment for those not fit for hell, nor for heaven at once. (Of course Luther would say we can sin all we want and still go to heaven at once, if only we believe it is all covered by Christ's merits: Epistle 501 to Melanchthon).

There is not much in Scripture on Purgatory except that in Second Maccabees 12:45, Judas sends a collection to the Temple for those fallen in battle, found with amulets on, "that they might be freed from this sin." Luther saw so clearly that this referred to Purgatory--which he rejected--that he rejected this book too, declaring it not part of Scripture. Other passages from Scripture that pertain to the teaching on Purgatory are: The need to make up for transgressions - Mt 5:25-26, Lk 12:58-59; nothing profane can enter heaven – Rev. 21:27; cleansing fire – 1 Cor 3:12-15; David, though forgiven, still punished for his sin – 2 Sam 12:13-14. But our belief in Purgatory rests on the tradition and definitions of the Church, at the Councils of Lyons II, Florence, and Trent.

The essential, perhaps the only suffering of Purgatory is the loss of God--it is like what we described in speaking of hell, except that in Purgatory there is no despair, rather, great consolation from assurance of salvation. Is there also something like fire in Purgatory? A host of private apparitions say there is; the Church has never pronounced on it. In fact the Eastern part of the Catholic Church has no such tradition. Many theologians say the suffering is greater than anything on earth. Neither Scripture nor Tradition tells us if that be so.

We do know that the souls there cannot merit or help themselves in any way anymore, they can only suffer. We know we can by prayers and penances relieve them, and somehow, they are enabled to know it when we do that, and they pray for us. How long should we pray and sacrifice for a particular soul? We do not know. St. Augustine in his Confessions (9:13), written 10 to 15 years after the death of his mother, St. Monica, still asked for prayers for her. If we can believe the private apparitions, Purgatory may last the equivalent of many years (we speak thus, for there is no time in Purgatory). For certain, it is terribly wrong to virtually canonize a person at the funeral, as Protestants do under the influence of Luther's sad mistake. Sadly not a few Catholics are imitating them.