

PURGATORY

“It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.” —2 Machabees 12:46

PURGATORY

The Two Catholic Views of Purgatory
Based on Catholic Teaching and Revelations of Saintly Souls

(From *All for Jesus*)

Fr. Frederick William Faber

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina



We approve highly of the republication of the work styled *All for Jesus*, by the Rev. F. W. Faber, which has been received so favorably by the Catholics of England.

† Francis Patrick Kenrick
Archbishop of Baltimore
Baltimore
January 20, 1854

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“Oh, what a wonderful thing is the life of a fervent Catholic! It is almost omnipotent, almost omnipresent, because it is not so much he who lives as Christ who liveth in him! Oh, what is it we are touching and handling every day of our lives, all so full of supernatural vigor, of secret unction, of divine force—and yet we consider not, but waste intentions and trifle time away in the midst of this stupendous supernatural system of grace, as unreflecting almost as stone embedded in the earth and borne round unconsciously in its impetuous revolutions day by day.”

—*Pages 60-61*



Father Frederick William Faber
1814-1863

Father Faber was born in Yorkshire, England in 1814. He was converted from the Anglican ministry to Catholicism in 1845. Ordained a priest in 1847, he joined the Oratorians in 1848 under John Henry Cardinal Newman. In addition to numerous fine hymns, Fr. Faber authored nine books: *Spiritual Conferences*, *All for Jesus*, *Growth in Holiness*, *The Blessed Sacrament*, *The Foot of the Cross*, *The Precious Blood*, *Bethlehem*, *The Creator and the Creature* and *Notes on Doctrinal Subjects*, plus a volume of poems, essays and other minor works. In addition, he published a series of 49 *Lives of Modern Saints* (the "Oratorian" Lives) which highlight the Saints' growth in sanctity under the operation of grace. Fr. Faber died in London in 1863. He is considered a master of the theology of the spiritual life.

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“But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment.”

—Matthew 12:36

“Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing.”

—Matthew 5:26

The Thought of Hell

IT IS incredible how dear the glory of God becomes to those who are continually on the lookout for it. The very search gives them new senses whereby they can find it, while daily increasing love is perpetually sharpening their discernment. "The earth is full of Thy glory." What a joy to a loving heart! But it is not enough that Heaven has overflowed and that the earth is filled with the blessed inundation of His glory. We would fain [wish] there should not be a nook of creation which is not full of it. Yet there is one place where that glory seems frustrated, one place from which there rises neither plaint of prayer, nor joy of praise, nor blessing of thanks, nor aspiration of desire. It is the house of those who have had their trial and lost their cause, and with it have lost God forever.

Here is grace which has not borne fruit, or whose fruits have rotted upon the tree. Here are Sacraments which have come to nought. The Cross has been a failure, and God's loving purposes have been successfully resisted and direfully overthrown. Yet it is of faith that God's harvest of glory out of that unutterable gloom is immense, for the lost soul is as much an unwilling

worship of His justice as the converted soul is a willing worship of His love. Neither is Jesus without His own interests there; for the pains, unspeakable as they are, nay, even in the bare thought of them intolerable, are less than the merit of sin, less than the righteous measure of punishment, and are so because of Him. The Precious Blood, in some sense, has reached even there.

The Fear of Hell Saves Souls

Neither is that horrible place without a most blessed result on the salvation of many souls, through the holy and salutary fear which it breeds in them and the loose and low notions of God which it corrects in the unthinking. When Our Lord showed Sister Francesca of the Blessed Sacrament, a Spanish Carmelite, the loss of a soul, and several times in a vision compelled her positively to study the separate tortures of that place, He upbraided her for weeping: "Francesca! Why weepest thou?" She fell prostrate at His sacred feet and said, "Lord! For the damnation of that soul, and the manner in which it has been damned." He vouchsafed to reply, "Daughter! It hath chosen to damn itself; I have given it many helps of grace that it might be saved, but it would not profit by them. I am pleased with your compassion, but I would have you rather love My justice." And another time, when she was compelled to fix her gaze upon those pains, the Angels said

to her, "O Francesca! Strive hard after the holy fear of God!" Who can doubt that there are, at this hour, thousands and tens of thousands in the bliss of Heaven who never would have been there if there had been no Hell. Alas for the reproach it is to the unloving hearts of men, but after all, the Cross of Christ has had no better help on earth than the unbearable fire of Hell.

Verily it is well for our own sakes to think sometimes of that horrid place! As truly as fair France lies across the Channel, as truly as the sun is shining on the white walls and gay bridges and bright gardens and many-storied palaces of its beautiful capital, as truly as that thousands of men and women there are living real lives and fulfilling various destinies, so truly is there such a place as Hell, all alive this hour with the multitudinous life of countless agonies and innumerable gradations of despair. Save the Blessed in Heaven, none live so keen or conscious a life as those millions of ruined souls. It is not impossible that we may go there too. It is not impossible that we may have sent some there already. When we pass along the streets, we must often see those who will inhabit there forever. There are some there now who were not there an hour ago. There are some now in the green fields, or in the busy towns, on comfortable beds, or on the sunshiny seas, who in another hour perhaps will have gone there. This is a dreadfully real truth.

It Is Good to Think of Hell

But what if more than all this be true? What if there was once a day when we should have gone thither if we had died? What if this hour it holds mere boys and girls, who have sinned far less than we have done, nay, perhaps have sinned but once, while we have sinned a thousand times? Oh, but we may humble ourselves still more. How long should we persevere in serving God if we were certified there was no Hell? Should we have left our sins if it had not been for Hell?

Oh, what a thing it is to be upon this good earth, and surrounded by all this hopeful life, when we have actually by our own hand and eye, word and thought and evil painstaking, worked out our right and title to all this everlasting woe. Ah! Just as the mist rises from the barren sea, where the corn grows not and the vines can bear no fruit, and forms the clouds which are to fall in fertilizing showers over hill and dale, so from those broad seas of fire and curse the Divine Compassion rises like a cloud to pour down streams of grace upon the souls of living men.

Let no one ever turn away from the sight of Hell, lest, by little and by little and by very little, a good opinion of himself should grow up within his soul and send him to that drear banishment at last. Indeed it is good, very good, to think of Hell, and of that kind wonder that we are not already there this hour. Nay, do not start—what you see is indeed the white light of earth's sun; fear not: that

sound—it is the wind that waves the branches of the wood; be assured, your eyes do not deceive you: those are the village spires that are sleeping in the misty, quiet landscape; all is right so far. We are here, and we are free; but we ought to have been—there, and slaves!

But if we give ourselves up to seek and find God's glory, and to make this our one occupation upon earth, must we go down to Hell and learn to rejoice with those awful attributes of God which are satisfied with that terrific sacrifice? No! God be praised; this is no part of our devotion. We are creatures of hope and love. We go where God's glory is possible to us, where we can help it and advance its interests; or if we rise into the impossible, it is only that love has carried us away into the silent eloquence of childlike, extravagant desire. We have nothing to do with Hell. We have seen that of our three things, the glory of God, the interests of Jesus and the salvation of souls, the two first may be found even there. But they are not there in ways which concern us, so reflections upon Hell are not necessary to my plan. Enough for us that there is such a place, and that at this hour it is full of souls, and that more and more are ever streaming into it, and that its frightful occupations are what they are, and that there is not one of us who is not running a risk or of whom it is not possible that that place may be his heritage and portion forever. They who serve Jesus out of love do not on that account forget these things. Nay, they remember them the more, because they love so much.

Devotion to the Souls in Purgatory

BUT although we are mercifully freed from descending into Hell to seek and promote the interests of Jesus, it is far from being so with Purgatory.

If Heaven and earth are full of the glory of God, so also is that most melancholy, yet most interesting land, where the prisoners of hope are detained by their Saviour's loving justice from the Beatific Vision; and if we can advance the interests of Jesus on earth and in Heaven, I may almost venture to say that we can do still more in Purgatory. And what I am endeavoring to show you in this treatise is how you may help God by prayer and the practices of devotion, whatever your occupation and calling may be; and all these practices apply especially to Purgatory. For although some theologians say that in spite of the Holy Souls placing no obstacle in the way, still the effect of prayer for them is not infallible, nevertheless it is much more certain than the effect of prayer for the conversion of sinners upon earth, where it is so often frustrated by their perversity and evil dispositions. Anyhow, what I have wanted to show has been this: that each of us, without aiming beyond

our grace, without austerities for which we have not courage, without supernatural gifts to which we lay no claim, may by simple affectionateness and the practices of sound Catholic devotion, do great things—things so great that they seem incredible—for the glory of God, the interests of Jesus and the good of souls.

Pray for Sinners or the Holy Souls?

I should therefore be leaving my subject very incomplete if I did not consider at some length devotion to the Holy Souls in Purgatory; and I will treat, not so much of particular practices of it, which are to be found in the ordinary manuals, as of the spirit of the devotion itself.

Rosignoli, in his *Wonders of God in Purgatory* (Opere 1:710), which he wrote at the request of Blessed Sebastian Valfré of the Turin Oratory, relates from the Dominican annals an interesting dispute between two good friars as to the respective merits of devotion for the conversion of sinners and devotion for the Holy Souls.

Bro. Bertrando was the great advocate of poor sinners, constantly said Mass for them, and offered up all his prayers and penances to obtain for them the grace of conversion. "Sinners," he said, "without grace, are in a state of perdition. Evil spirits are continually laying snares for them, to deprive them of the Beatific Vision and to carry them off to eternal torments. Our Blessed Lord came down from Heaven and died a most

painful death for them. What can be a higher work than to imitate Him and to cooperate with Him in the salvation of souls? When a soul is lost, the price of its redemption is lost also. Now the souls in Purgatory are safe. They are sure of their eternal salvation. It is most true that they are plunged into a sea of sorrows, but they are sure to come out at last. They are the friends of God, whereas sinners are His enemies, and to be God's enemy is the greatest misery in creation."

Bro. Benedetto was an equally enthusiastic advocate of the suffering souls. He offered all his free Masses for them, as well as his prayers and penances. Sinners, he said, were bound with the chains of their own will. They could leave off sinning if they pleased. The yoke was of their own choosing, whereas the dead were tied hand and foot against their own will in the most atrocious sufferings.

"Now come, dear Bro. Bertrando, tell me—suppose there were two beggars, one well and strong, who could use his hands and work if he liked, but chose to suffer poverty rather than part with the sweets of idleness; and the other, sick and maimed and helpless, who in his piteous condition could do nothing but supplicate help with cries and tears—which of the two would deserve compassion most, especially if the sick one was suffering the most intolerable agonies? Now this is just the case between sinners and the Holy Souls. These last are suffering an excruciating martyrdom, and they have no means of helping

themselves. It is true they have deserved these pains for their sins, but they are now already cleansed for those sins. They must have returned to the grace of God before they died, else they would not have been saved. They are now most dear, inexpressibly dear, to God; and surely charity, well ordered, must follow the wise love of the Divine Will and love most what He loves most."

Bro. Bertrando, however, would not give way, though he did not quite see a satisfactory answer to his friend's objection. But the night following, he had an apparition which it seems so convinced him that from that time he changed his practice, and offered up all his Masses, prayers and penances for the Holy Souls. It would appear as if the authority of St. Thomas might be quoted on the side of Bro. Benedetto, as he says, "Prayer for the dead is more acceptable than for the living, for the dead are in the greatest need of it and cannot help themselves, as the living can." (Suppl. 3. Part, q. 71, art. 5 ad 3).

St. Teresa of Avila

How acceptable this devotion is to Almighty God, and how He vouchsafes to seem, as it were, impatient for the deliverance of the souls, and yet to leave it to our charity, is taught us on the unimpeachable authority of St. Teresa. In the Book of her *Foundations*, she tells us that D. Bernardino di Mendoza gave her a house, garden and vineyard for a convent at Valladolid. Two months after

this, and before the foundation was effected, he was suddenly taken ill and lost the power of speech, so that he could not make a Confession, though he gave many signs of contrition. "He died," says St. Teresa, "very shortly, and far from the place where I then was. But Our Lord spoke to me and told me that he was saved, though he had run a great risk, for that He had had mercy upon him because of the gift he had given for the convent of His Blessed Mother; but that his soul would not be freed from Purgatory until the first Mass was said in the new house. I felt so deeply the pains this soul was suffering that, although I was very desirous of accomplishing the foundation of Toledo, I left it at once for Valladolid. Praying one day at Medino del Campo, Our Lord told me to make haste, for that soul was suffering grievously. On this I started at once, though I was not well prepared for it, and arrived at Valladolid on St. Lawrence's day."

She then goes on to relate that, as she received Communion at the first Mass said in the house, her benefactor's soul appeared to her all glorious, and afterward entered Heaven. She did not expect this, for as she observes, "Although it had been revealed to me that this would happen at the first Mass, I thought it must mean the first Mass when the Blessed Sacrament would be reserved there."

We might multiply almost indefinitely the revelations of the Saints which go to prove the special