

Homily: 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday: Cycle C: 2022: 2 Mc 7: 1-2, 9-14; Ps. 17; 2 Thes 2:16 – 3:5; Lk  
20: 27-38

**“The Reality of Purgatory in the authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church”**

1. In the Month of November the Church calls us to focus our attention on what has traditionally been called **the Last Things**: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. Today I would like to offer a brief reflection on the reality of Purgatory and the importance of praying for the dead. See the story from Fr. Benedict Groeschel on the Protestant lady who came to believe in Purgatory based on the reality of the ppl in her life: *most of them are not good enough to go straight to Heaven, I hope they are not bad enough to go to Hell, and so the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory makes sense as it gives me hope for all the people around me to get cleaned up spiritually after death if it doesn't happen fully in this life.* All people who need it go to Purgatory – not just Catholics!

To be a bit more theologically precise than that dear lady, in **the Catechism of the Catholic Church** which is the authoritative standard of what we believe and teach as Catholics teaches us the following about Purgatory which is a dogma of the Faith and so is not an optional belief: **1030** All who die in God's grace and friendship, but are still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

**1031** The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.<sup>606</sup> The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire: <sup>607</sup> (see 1 Corth 3:15 & 1 Pet 1:7)

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.<sup>608</sup>

**1032** This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sin."<sup>609</sup> From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.<sup>610</sup> The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.<sup>611</sup>

2. We hear in the Second book of Maccabees that **it is an excellent and noble thing to pray for the dead**, with the Resurrection of the dead in view (see 2 Macc 12: 43-46). This is the same book we hear from today concerning the heroic martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons. The Catholic Church includes praying for the dead as one of **the Spiritual Works of Mercy**. We can do this in a number of different ways: by offering Masses for the deceased person(s) (which is the best way since the Mass is the most perfect prayer), by daily prayer, by offering our daily sufferings in union with Christ, and offering any merit or indulgence (partial or full) we obtain from the Lord's mercy for the departed souls
  
3. **Why do the dead need prayers?** Well, because they might be in **Purgatory** (the very word mean to be purified). When we die, we go to one of three places: **Heaven, Hell or Purgatory**. To go directly to Heaven we must be a saint, meaning that we are perfectly purified and detached from all sin, big and small and that we have made sufficient reparation for the damage our sins caused in this world. **Saints** each in their own way are truly an image of Christ, in their heroic love for God and others in **ALL** aspects of their lives. This is a far too rare occurrence (St. Teresa of Avila who often conversed with departed souls and prayed for all of them said that "*among all the souls I have seen there are **only three** who totally escaped Purgatory after death.*" **Hungry Souls, p. 44**); it is safe to say, just from observation, that most people at the moment of death are NOT saints! What a unfortunate reality that is (*the only real tragedy in life as one writer famously put it*), for the grace is there for all of us to become a saint, but it often doesn't occur in this life, and we can't blame God for that but only ourselves! **Why is it that most people do not die as saints?** Well, because it is hard work to become a saint! It's one thing to know **what is good** in our minds; it's another thing to consistency choose it in our wills, day in and day out, with all the obstacles that this life throws at us. Let's ask God to help us respond better to the ways of holiness and daily help the souls who are being purified in eternity, and who pray for us and appreciate our kindness beyond our comprehension.