

Felix, Richard
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AFTER DEATH --- WHAT?

By Rev. Richard Felix, O.S.B.

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by

REV. RICHARD FELIX, O.S.B.

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LIFE AFTER DEATH

NO truth of revealed religion is set forth more clearly in Holy Scripture than the fact that we shall live after death. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin and in my flesh I shall see my God. This my hope is laid up in my bosom" (Job 19, 25). Daniel the Prophet speaks to the same effect: "Those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always" (12, 2). But of all the pictures given us in the Old Testament of the final resurrection, none is so graphic or so gripping as that recorded in the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel. "The hand of the Lord was upon me and brought me forth in the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of a plain that was full of bones. And He said to me: Son of man, dost thou think these bones shall live? And I answered: O Lord God, Thou Knowest. And He said to me: Prophecy concerning these bones and say to them, Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Behold, I will send spirit into you and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you and will cause flesh to grow over you and will cover you with skin, and I will give you spirit and you shall live and you shall know that I am the Lord. And I prophesied as He had commanded me; and as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a commotion. And the bones



AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

came together, each one to its joint. And I saw, and behold the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin was stretched out over them; but there was no spirit in them. And he said to me: Prophecy to the spirit, O son of man, prophecy, and say to the spirit, Thus said the Lord God, Come, Spirit, from the four winds, and blow upon these slain and let them live again. And I prophesied as He had commanded me. And the spirit came into them, and they lived; and they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ez. 37, 1).

In the New Testament constant reference is made to the resurrection of the body. In the Gospel of St. John for instance we read, "Jesus said to Martha: Thy brother shall rise again. Martha said to Him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her: I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live" (Jno. 11, 23).

During the public life of our Blessed Lord, Jesus raised at least three persons from death to life. These three are recorded. There may have been many more. The three resurrections recorded in the Gospels embrace the three stages of death: first, the daughter of Jairus, dead but a few hours; secondly, the son of the widow of Naim, who had been dead several days and was being carried out to burial; and thirdly, Lazarus, who was dead and had been buried for a number of days. By calling back the dead to life Jesus gave proof of His power over death and the grave. Hence the significance of that saying of the

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

Savior, "They that shall be accounted worthy of that world, and of the Resurrection from the dead can die no more; for they are equal to the Angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the Resurrection" (Luke 20, 35). Besides bringing back the dead to life our Blessed Lord foretold not once but many times His own Resurrection from the dead (e. g. Matt. 20, 19). What He had thus foretold came to pass precisely as He had predicted (Luke 24, 39; Jno. 20, 20). And inasmuch as He has proclaimed that all the dead shall rise again it follows that this prediction will likewise be fulfilled to the letter.

What Christ proclaimed so plainly concerning the resurrection of the body, the Apostles repeated over and over again. "We will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them who have slept through Jesus, God will bring with Him" (1 Thess. 4, 12). St. Paul in speaking of the dead as they who are asleep, signifies that death shall have an awakening. Our Divine Lord used the same expression for death when He informed His followers that Lazarus was dead, saying to them, "Lazarus, our friend, sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep" (Jno. 11, 11). In his Epistle to the Romans the Apostle further declares, "if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you; He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, shall quicken also your mortal bodies, because of His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8, 11).

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

How all this will be accomplished we know not. But accomplished it will be. The lowly caterpillar that crawls upon the earth and feeds on leaves and weeds buries itself at autumn time in a tomb of its own making; and after a few months bursts the confines of its sepulchre, a winged creature of the air, a beautiful butterfly which now scorns the earth and lives on the nectar of fragrant flowers. So too, the Apostle tells us, it will be with our bodies. "It is sown in corruption; it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness; it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body; it shall rise a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15, 42). On the word of our Lord, "The hour cometh, wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things shall come forth unto the Resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the Resurrection of judgment" (Jno. 5, 28).

What happens immediately after death?

When man dies, his body and soul are separated for a time; the body is buried and returns to dust; the soul goes at once to God to be judged and is rewarded or punished according to its works.

The judgment immediately after death is known as the Particular Judgment. The necessity of a Particular Judgment is evident from the fact that at death the souls of different men go to different destinations, Purgatory, Hell, or Heaven. The communication to the soul of its sentence immediately after

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

death obviously involves a judgment immediately after death. Although never expressly mentioned in the Bible, the idea of a Particular Judgment is clearly implied in those passages which speak of an immediate retribution after death. Our Lord taught that Dives was punished and Lazarus rewarded directly after death (Luke 16, 22), and He promised Paradise to the penitent thief at once (Luke 23, 43). The judgment set forth as an article of faith in all of the ancient Creeds—the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian—is the final or General Judgment.

What is meant by the General Judgment?

The fact that there will be a General Judgment is emphasized throughout the Sacred Scriptures. The Prophets of the Old Law call it the "Day of the Lord" (Joel 2, 31; Ezechiel 13, 5; Isaias 2, 12). Our Lord describes it in minute detail (Matt. 24, 27; 25, 31) and His Apostles mention it frequently (Acts 10, 42; 17, 31; Rom. 2, 5; 14, 10; 1 Cor. 4, 5; 2 Cor. 5, 10; 2 Tim. 4, 1; 2 Thess. 1, 5; James 5, 7).

The General Judgment of mankind will take place at the end of the world. The bodies of all men will be reunited with their souls and every man will come before God for a second and final judgment. In the Particular Judgment only the soul appears before God. In the General Judgment the body as well as the soul of each individual will receive the reward or punishment that it justly deserves. At that time all the words and works of men, even their most secret thoughts, will be made manifest to the

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

world. At that time the Mercy and Justice of God will be vindicated before all the world. At that time will take place the great and eternal segregation of the Good from the wicked; the former to hear the welcoming word of our Lord, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25, 34); and the latter those terrifying words that will ring in their ears throughout eternity, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25, 41).

What an awakening that will be on Judgment Day! How different the sentiments that will well up in the souls of the Just and the unjust on that day of days! What remorse and regret will haunt the heart of the impious, the ungodly, the scoffer at Religion. What joy and peace and holy happiness will possess the soul of the Saved! Banished from God eternally, yet beholding for one brief moment the glory and rich reward of those who in life served God sincerely, the lost will lament: "These are they whom we had some time in derision and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honor. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God and their lot is among the Saints. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us! All those things have passed away like a shadow,

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

and as a ship that passeth through the waves whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters; so we also have been able to show no mark of virtue, but are consumed in our wickedness. Such things as these said the sinners in Hell But the Just shall live forevermore, and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High. They shall receive a Kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisdom 5, 5).

What will be the nature and condition of our bodies in the Resurrection?

It is the teaching of the Church that the body which will be reunited to the soul at the Resurrection will be identified with the one inhabited by the soul on earth. Every soul will receive back its own body. "This corruptible body," says St. Paul, "must needs put on incorruption, and this mortal body immortality" (1 Cor. 15, 53). Consequently it is the one and same body which, having been corruptible and mortal in this life, becomes incorruptible and immortal after the Resurrection.

Moreover the risen body will be whole and entire, perfect and complete in every respect. No infirmities, no deformities of any kind will be seen in Heaven. Thus St. Augustine tells us, "As all the members of the body appertain to the integrity of human nature, they shall all be restored together. They who were either blind from birth or lost their sight on account of some disease, the lame, the maimed, and the par-

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

alyzed shall rise again with an entire and perfect body." The same holy Doctor then goes on to express the expectation that "whatever old age or disease has wasted in the body shall be repaired by the divine power of Christ," and that "the body will be raised not in an immature or decrepit condition but as it appeared in the prime of life" (De Civitate Dei, 22, 16).

HEAVEN



WHAT is Heaven? In attempting to give an answer to this question we must remember that any statement about Heaven is bound to be miserably inadequate and far short of the full truth. This misfortune is rooted in the limitations of our nature. God is an infinite Person; His attributes in every way infinite; His home one of infinite holiness and happiness, one of infinite beauty and loveliness. But we being finite and having only a very limited conception of things that are infinite can speak of them only by way of analogy, that is to say, in human terms.

With this understanding then we ask in all humility, What is Heaven? Heaven, says the Church, is the clear Vision and the perfect Possession of God. The essential happiness of Heaven is found in the blessed Vision of God, the Beatific Vision, as it is called; seeing God, and in seeing God, seeing all things as in a mirror; seeing God, loving God, enjoying God, in one word, the possession of God; that is Heaven. On the other hand the pain of privation, the lack of God's presence, the loss of His possession make up the main misery of Hell.

To think correctly on this subject we must keep in mind that we have been created for Heaven. In creating us for Heaven, the Creator endowed us with all the faculties that we would need in order to enjoy Heaven. In the faculties of the soul and body that

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

God gave us, we have a definite, though indirect, intimation of the joys of Heaven.

The human soul thirsts for knowledge and hungers for love; the bodily senses yearn for sensible delights. Heaven therefore must and does supply every faculty with its supreme satisfaction, must and does meet every legitimate longing of the human heart.

That the soul of man thirsts for knowledge is evident to every one. The inquisitive child, the man of science in his laboratory, people pouring over the evening newspaper are all seeking one thing, knowledge. They are in quest of one object only, truth. In Heaven this thirst of the soul for truth will be more than satisfied in the blessed Vision of God, which is nothing less than the storehouse of God's Mind laid open and made manifest to the eye of man. All that is knowable is in God. The knowledge and science that men may gather by generations of study and research are only partial and veiled glimpses of God's Mind reflected in matter. "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known" (1 Cor. 13, 12). The soul seeing God face to face in Heaven drinks in the knowledge of all things at their fountain-head, and to the utmost of its created ability knows all things with the knowledge of God.

The second thing desired by the soul is love—to love and to be loved. The history of the human race and of every individual in it bears witness to this fact. In God this hunger of the human soul for love

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

will be gratified fully. "God is Love" (Jno. 4, 16), Love personified. All that is lovable is in God. All parental love, the love of fathers and mothers; all filial love, the love of little ones; all martial love, the love of husbands and wives; all fraternal love, the love of kinsfolk; all friendship; all ties of affection; the love of the good, the sublime, the beautiful; all these are but so many sparks from the divine furnace, the loving and adorable Heart of God. The hunger of the soul for love will be sated in the loving possession of God. The soul, loving God with all the powers of its being and in turn beloved by Him who is Love itself, rests in God. To the faithful soul on Judgment Day our Lord will say, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25, 21). Observe, it is not said, "May the joy of thy Lord enter into thee," but "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Man's third want is that of sensible delight, that is, the enjoyment that the soul derives through the senses. All the delights of the senses freed from the dross and alloy that sin brought into the world are enjoyed in Heaven. Nature in all of its wonderful forms and colors, in all of its glory and grandeur is nothing more than a thought of God presented to man in matter. That is why nature so appeals to the human heart. In its beauties we catch a glimpse of the glory and beauty of God Himself. The resurrected man takes into eternity all the senses and faculties that he possessed here on earth. There these same senses and faculties will be spiritualized and will seek with an eternal longing for their proper

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

objects, and in God will have their every longing satisfied. This is no less true of the sensible delights of man than it is of his quest for truth and love.

In Heaven too will be renewed and intensified all the love and affection that was ours in life. We will know one another more dearly and more clearly than even on earth. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, relatives and friends, all who once parted in tears shall meet and know and never part again. In that day, says St. John, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away" (Apoc. 21, 4). The loving companionship of our dear ones, our family, our friends; our intimate fellowship with the Saints and Angels, with Mary the Mother of Jesus, with our Blessed Lord Himself; all this will be ours in God, the possession of whom is Heaven. Truly, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2, 9).

How is it possible for man to enjoy the delights of sense in the world to come?

First of all it is a mistaken notion to think that the universe will be utterly destroyed on the last day. It will not be destroyed. All of man's works and all that Adam's fall brought into the world will be consumed but neither the earth nor the starry heavens above will cease to exist. They will be changed only.

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

“As a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed” (Hebr. 1, 12). And again God says in Isaias, “Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth” (65, 17). St. Peter tells us, “We look for new heavens and a new earth according to His promises” (2 Peter 3, 13), and St. John in the Apocalypse, “He that sat on the throne said: Behold I make all things new” (21, 5). Nature then renewed in God and glorified will continue to give joy to the resurrected man in eternity and fill his heart with sensible delight.

In the final resurrection the souls of all men will be reunited with their bodies. The bodies of the elect will be spiritualized like unto the body of our Risen Lord on Easter Day. Endowed with agility they will be able to transport themselves anywhere with the swiftness of thought; matter will no longer be a barrier to them; clarity and the glory of Grace will shine from their countenance—every saved soul a spiritualized creature, a living jewel sparkling with the splendor of God. Wherever they may go new and magnificent beauties will burst upon them. Every moment of their existence will bring its new delights; delights that will never diminish or dwindle, because they radiate from One who is Infinite; delights that will renew ever their life of joy in God, impelling them to break forth in that hymn of praise sung by all in the heavenly court, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, all the earth is full of Thy glory” (Isaias 6, 3).

What does the Church tell us about the Angels?

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

The Angels were the first citizens of Heaven. Unlike the Saints the Angels never lived in this world or possessed material bodies. They were created pure spirits, intellectual beings distinct from God and by nature of higher dignity than man. Their number is told in the millions. Christ Himself spoke of legions of them. According to their dignity and nearness to God the Angels are divided into nine choirs; namely, the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones; the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers; the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. Each of these choirs probably comprises many millions.

Upon creation none of the Angels were admitted at once to the presence of God but all were put to a test to prove their worthiness of Heaven. The nature of this test has not been revealed to us. It is the common opinion of theologians however that God made known to the Angels that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity would one day become man and in the flesh redeem a creature of lesser dignity than they and thus make it possible for man to attain Heaven. Many of the Angels with Lucifer at their head rebelled against God, refused to believe and obey, and were banished eternally from Heaven. "God spared not the Angels that sinned, but delivered them unto torments" (2 Petr. 2, 4). Thus the origin of Hell. Out of envy lest man should acquire the place that they had forfeited in Heaven these evil spirits seek to draw man away from God and bring about his spiritual ruin. Their power though is limited to suggestion

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

and temptation; they may never coerce the will of man.

Most of the Angels however were true to God in the test that He gave them and were admitted then into Heaven. These good Angels make up the heavenly court and will spend eternity in the joy and glorification of God. God employs some of them as His messengers in the guidance and government of the world. To each man at birth is assigned a special Angel called his Guardian Angel whose duty it is to protect his charge throughout life, shield him from the snares of the spirits of evil, suggest good thoughts to him, offer his prayers and good works to the Almighty, protect him especially in the hour of death, and after death conduct his soul to the throne of the Most High for judgment. This sums up in brief the teaching of the Church concerning the Angels.

What should one think of the idea of Heaven held by those outside the Church?

Outside the Church the idea of Heaven has been greatly distorted. Those who left the Church in the sixteenth century discarded the theology of the Church about Heaven along with many other things of historic Christianity. In consequence they have been forced ever since to fall back more and more on the imagery of Scripture. For over four hundred years now they have talked and preached and sung of Heaven as a place of harps and hymns and crowns of gold and streets of jasper. These of course are but symbols. As symbols they are good as far as they

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

go but they give us no more an idea of the life of Heaven than pictures of men with wings give us a notion of the being of Angels. Substituting the symbol for the substance and discarding the teaching of the Church on the subject, the non-Catholic world for centuries has had no food for its mind on this subject except the symbols; and symbols, while they may serve very well as stimuli for the imagination, are not food sufficient for the intellect. The result is that for the average man Heaven, thought of in terms of endless hymn-singing, is anything but attractive. This however is not the idea of the Church about Heaven. For her Heaven is the clear Vision and the perfect Possession of God with all that that implies.

Will all men go to Heaven?

Those who live without God in this life cannot expect to live with God in life eternal. Our Lord Himself has told us, "Not every man that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of My Father who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 7, 21). Fifteen hundred years ago the great St. Augustine observed that "though God has brought us into this world without consulting us about it, He will not save us without our cooperation" (Sermo 169). Our cooperation is absolutely necessary. "He who doth the Will of My Father, he shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." A good life, freedom from sin, the state of Sanctifying Grace, wholehearted

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

obedience to Christ and to the One Church that Christ established in this world; these are the keys that unlock the portals of Paradise and fit one for the abode of the Blessed.

HELL



IS there a literal Hell? No indeed, says the man-about-town. He simply cannot brook the idea of Hell or bring himself to believe in such a dreadful doctrine. The very word grates upon his sensitive soul. He hates to hear it even mentioned. The notion of Hell, he will tell you, is something medieval, outmoded, incompatible with the modern conception of God. Thus speaks the live-as-you-like individual. But what does Christ say about Hell? After all, it is His word and His word alone that counts in a question like this. What does Christ say about the matter?

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament will convince one that our Lord was very explicit in His teaching about the reality of Hell. In demanding that men follow Him and believe in His Gospel, Christ continually tells them that their eternal salvation is at stake and that they will suffer eternal damnation if they die in their sins. Thus He warns them against the sin of impenitence (Matt. 12, 32) and the sin of scandal (Matt. 18, 8); He urges the duty of charity (Jno. 15, 6) and the virtue of chastity (Matt. 5, 28)—all under the penalty of eternal punishment. The Kingdom of Heaven is for those “who do His Father’s will,” the pit of Hell for “the workers of iniquity” (Matt. 7, 21).

It was the custom of Christ to present the truths that He came to teach us in the form of parables.

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

Many of the parables of our Lord close with a condemnation of the wicked to Hell: e.g., the parable of the tares and the wheat (Matt. 13, 24), of the net (Matt. 13, 47), of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16, 18), of the great supper (Luke 14, 16), of the royal wedding feast (Matt. 22, 13), of the wise and the foolish virgins (Matt. 25, 10) and of the talents (Matt. 25, 14). Even in His Sermon on the Mount our Lord refers to Hell six different and distinct times.

The teaching of Christ concerning the dread reality of Hell is brought out best of all perhaps in the graphic picture that He gives us of the Last Judgment. All the millions of men are gathered together before the Judgment seat of the King who is Christ Himself. "All nations shall be gathered together before Him, and He shall separate them one from the other, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand: Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world and then He shall say to them also that shall be on His left hand: Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels and these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting" (Matt. 25, 32).

The Apostles repeat the teachings of our Lord. St. Peter tells us that false prophets and lying teachers shall be punished in Hell like the rebel angels (2

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

Peter 2, 1). St. Jude speaks of ungodly men, deniers of Christ who like the fallen angels shall suffer the punishment of eternal fire and shall be cast into eternal darkness (Jude 4). St. Paul consoles the Thessalonians by promising them a fitting reward in the future for their faith and constancy here on earth and assures them that their persecutors shall be banished eternally from the Lord and undergo everlasting tribulation (2 Thess. 1, 6). The wicked, he tells us elsewhere, shall not possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6, 9; Gal. 5, 19; Eph. 5, 5).

In view of all this we cannot escape the conclusion that there is a literal Hell. Christ taught the doctrine plainly. No artifice of speech or method of modern exegesis can minimize the meaning of His unmistakable words. There is a Hell and that Hell is a menacing reality for every member of the human race. Whether or not we shall escape that dungeon of despair depends entirely on us. "Consider that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand death and evil: That thou mayest love the Lord thy God and walk in His ways and keep His commandments but if thy heart be turned away so that thou wilt not hear, and being deceived with error thou adore strange gods and serve them, I foretell thee this day that thou shalt perish I call Heaven and earth to witness this day that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life that thou may live" (Deut. 30, 15).

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

In what does the punishment of Hell consist?

“Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25, 41). In these words Christ our Lord tells us three truths about Hell concerning which there may be no doubt or uncertainty. First, the damned in Hell are cursed of God and separated from Him forever (Depart from Me, ye cursed); secondly, they must suffer terribly (fire); and thirdly, their sufferings will endure eternally (everlasting fire).

God alone can satisfy the soul of man. God alone can fill the heart of man with happiness. To be banished from Heaven and branded with the curse of God eternally—what unutterable catastrophe this! Second only to the eternal loss of God is the pain of punishment suffered by the damned. Christ refers to this constantly under the figure of fire (e.g., Mark 9, 42; Luke 16, 24; Matt. 25, 41). Our Lord had the whole dictionary at His command yet He deliberately chose the word fire to describe Hell. The nature of this fire is unknown. The Catholic Church indulges neither in fantastic exaggeration nor in foolish denial concerning the reality of this fire. Fire it is and that says enough. Lastly, Hell is everlasting. The soul of man is immortal. It will live as long as God is God and that means forever and ever. It will live either with God in Heaven or without God in the company and condition of the devils of Hell. “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.” Terrible truths these, but truths that come from the lips of that same Christ

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

who died on a cross that He might save men from such a fate if only they would avoid sin and avail themselves of His redeeming blood.

How can a sin committed in a moment of time deserve an eternity of punishment?

Even in this world duration of punishment is not determined by the length of time it took to commit the offense. For instance, murder may be the work of a moment yet it is justly punished by long years of imprisonment and even death. The Church teaches that only those go to Hell who die in mortal sin. But mortal sin is not an accidental mishap that may overtake a man unawares. Mortal sin is the knowing and conscious violation of the law of God in an important matter. He, who commits a mortal sin, sins with eyes open, knowing full well what he is doing yet deliberately choosing to do that which he knows to be seriously evil. God is not only infinitely good and merciful but He is also infinitely just and holy. His justice and holiness compel Him to hate and punish sin in proportion to its guilt. If there were any chance of conversion in the next world or any hope that Hell might come to an end even after a million years how few would shrink from sin. The thought of eternal punishment alone could and does deter the average man from sin.

Fear of punishment is not indeed the highest or most noble motive for good conduct. Yet our Lord who is Wisdom incarnate appeals constantly to this motive and tells us that Hell is the one and only thing

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

that we need to fear in this life (e.g. Matt. 10, 28; 18, 8). Even in human affairs prudence demands that we take precaution against the things that threaten our well-being. We do not trifle with pestilence. We shun and avoid smallpox. That is what God wants us to do with regard to Hell. He would have us fear Hell and shun it in the same way and for the same reason that we fear and avoid any dreadful disease. People who live good lives are not worried about Hell any more than the orderly citizen is disturbed by the presence of jails and penitentiaries in our midst. He knows that these things exist but that they do not exist for him as long as he lives an honest and honorable life. So too with the good Christian. He knows full well that there is a Hell and that it would be foolish for him to decry or deny the existence of such a place. But he knows too that if he lives a sincere Christian life Hell shall never claim him. Such fear is salutary and soul-saving. "The fear of the Lord driveth out sin" (Ecclesiasticus 1, 27).

What souls will be sent to Hell?

As we live so we die, and as we die so we shall be throughout the endless ages of eternity. This life is a period of preparation for the next. Heaven or Hell, whichever it be, is but the logical continuation of the kind of life we have lived here on earth. In a very real sense then every man decides his own destiny in eternity. The sentence which will be imposed on the soul in the final Judgment, whether it be for eternal weal or for eternal woe, is nothing more than

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

God's ratification of the sentence that each one has composed for himself in life. "God will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2, 4) but God will not force a man to be saved. "It depends on the will of man, whether he shall do or not do" (Numbers 30, 14). Whether we will be saved or not depends on us. If a man dies with his will rebellious to God he puts himself in Hell. Who then will go to Hell? The answer is plain: those who put themselves there by ignoring God in this life and defying His holy law. And who will go to Heaven? The answer is equally clear: those who love God and keep His commandments. Words without deeds do not count. Christ was not content merely to declare His love for us. He lived it. If we love Him truly we must show it by the service of our lives. "If you love Me keep My commandments" (Jno. 11, 15).

It is consoling to consider that up to the last moment of life the sinner may turn from his evil way and be saved. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the sinner, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezech. 18, 32). No sin is too great for God's mercy nor any number of sins too many for His forgiveness. Christ who is God in human flesh came into this world solely to save sinners. That was the one and only purpose of His coming. His life, His doctrine, His death on the cross all bear eloquent testimony to that. Christ established His Church to continue His mission of mercy and salvation to sinful, sinning men. Christ gave to His priests "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5, 18)

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

and set up within His Church the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance as two perpetual fountain-heads of mercy and forgiveness for repentant men. Truly God has left nothing undone to save even the worst sinner in the world. But man must be in earnest with God and make use of the means of mercy placed at his disposal. For God who has promised forgiveness to the penitent sinner has not promised him his own time for repentance. If the sinner persists in his evil life, puts off his conversion, and presumes on God's mercy, he will find the Justice of God overtaking him without warning and when he least expects it. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee" (Ecclesiasticus 5, 8).

PURGATORY

THE Catholic doctrine of Purgatory is a truth so grounded in Scripture and Tradition, so consonant with reason, and so consoling to the human heart that it is more than strange that it should ever be called into question. It was set forth explicitly in the Old Testament and at least assumed in the New; it was taught by all the Fathers and writers of the early Church and found expression in all the ancient liturgies of the Eastern as well as the Western world; for fifteen hundred years the whole of Christendom held fast to this doctrine as a fundamental fact of the Christian faith.

It remained for the reformers of the sixteenth century, when they undertook to reform the irreformable Church of Christ, to be the first to deny it. Denying as they did the efficacy of prayer for the dead, they were obliged to deny the existence of a state of purgation after death; and to support the denial of Purgatory, they had to deny further the possibility of venial or slight sins. But all these denials are repugnant alike to reason and to revelation.

Unaided reason sees that all sins cannot be deadly to the soul. The very nature of Justice would be destroyed if all sins were equal, for it is the office of Justice not only to punish but to proportion the punishment to the crime of the offender. All human laws are founded upon this principle. According to

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

the greatness of his crime and the degree of guilt, a man will be given a light sentence in jail or life-long confinement in a penitentiary.

What reason of itself would tell us, Revelation confirms. That there are different degrees of guilt in sin and that some sins, while displeasing indeed to God, are not deadly to the soul is evident from more than one passage of Scripture. Our Lord rebukes the Scribes because they "strain out a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23, 24). He compares some sins to a beam and other to a mote (Luke 6, 41). He declares that the sin of Judas was greater than that of Pilate (Jno. 19, 11). St. James the Apostle wrote, "In many things we all offend" (3, 2). Surely the Apostles and the Saints of God did not sin seriously and often and "in many things." St. James would not write in that matter-of-fact way if those offenses were not slight and of such a nature that a man falling into them even "seven times" may still be called "just" by the Holy Ghost (Prov. 24, 16).

It would seem further that a place of purgation is a necessity for most men if they are to be saved at all. Those who die wholly bad are banished forever from the Presence of God and delivered at once to eternal damnation; those who die wholly good are welcomed at once into the Presence of God and enjoy forever the sense and glory of eternal salvation. Only the willfully wicked go to Hell; only the perfectly perfect go to Heaven. But what about those who are neither altogether good nor altogether bad, who leave this life soiled with slight sin? That, let us

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

hope, will take in the most of us. On the word of God absolutely nothing defiled may enter into Heaven (Wisd. 7, 25; Hab. 1, 3; Apoc. 21, 27). If such are to be saved at all it can only be in a place and through a process of purgation which the Christian Church has ever called Purgatory. In the words of St. Paul there are sins for which "he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3, 15). At the time of our Lord there was such a place or prison and there were souls in it because in times past they "had been incredulous" (1 Petr. 3, 20). Yet they were just souls for to them the soul of Christ descended immediately after His death on the Cross that He might announce to them the glad news of their ransom and redemption. Then too, recall that other word of warning of our Lord, reminding man of that prison from which He says "Thou shalt not go out from thence until thou repay the last farthing" (Matt. 5, 26; comp. Luke 12, 59). This is exactly what the Church understands by Purgatory.

That those who are detained in that prison of Purgatory can be relieved by the prayers and good works of the living has always been the belief of God's people. The practice of praying for the dead is plainly taught in the Old Testament and to this day piously practiced by the Hebrew race. "And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection" (2 Mach. 12, 43). So thought our brethren of the old dispensation. Concerning the be-

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

lief of the early Christians we can do nothing better than bring you the testimony of St. Augustine. He relates that when his mother was at the point of death, she beckoned him to her bedside and said to him, "Son, when I am dead, lay this body anywhere; let not the care of it in any way disturb you. This only do I request of you that wherever you be, you remember me at the Altar of the Lord." And that pious son then prays most earnestly for the soul of his dear departed mother, saying, "O God of my heart, I do beseech Thee for the sins of my mother. Through the medicine of the wounds that hung upon the wood, hear me and heal her. Have mercy on her, O Lord, and inspire my brethren, that as many as shall read these words may remember at Thy Altar, Monica, my mother" (Conf. 9, 27). Thus cried out the soul of a Saint fifteen hundred years ago. No monument of marble, no mountain of cut flowers, no mere memorial service can soothe the sorrowing heart of man in the sight of his beloved dead. We stand by the open grave and see lowered into the earth the last remains of our loved ones; instinctively, we turn our eyes to Heaven and with a heart full of faith and confidence repeat that consoling prayer of the Church: May his (or her) soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

In what way does Purgatory differ from Hell?

Purgatory differs from Hell widely and in many ways. The essential note of distinction between the two states is found in the fact that Hell is permanent

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

and eternal while Purgatory is passing and temporary. The soul made for God and drawn to God as steel is drawn to a magnet, realizing at last that its one and only happiness consists in possessing God, in Hell is banished from God eternally and deprived of the beatifying Presence of Him who alone can make it happy. This sense of privation, this eternal loss of God is the greatest misfortune that can befall the soul of man. The souls in Purgatory likewise are not permitted to see God. The souls in Purgatory however are saved souls. Knowing that their exile from Paradise is for a time only, they live in eager expectation of the blessed day when they will be admitted to the beatifying Presence and Possession of God. The damned in Hell live eternally in despair, without hope or love; the saved in Purgatory live in hope and suffer in love, knowing that their time of purgation is but temporal and that as soon as they are free from the least stain of sin they will be permitted to enter into the eternal happiness. In eternity there are but two permanent states, Heaven and Hell. Purgatory will come to an end with the end of time.

What souls go to Purgatory?

There is only one key that opens the gates of Heaven and gives man a real right to eternal reward and that one key is the possession of Divine Grace* without spot or scar. The soul that appears before God in the state of Divine Grace without the least

*The possession of Heaven is predicated upon the possession of Divine Grace. For further study of this important subject, see Chapter 13 of The Apostles' Creed advertised on the last page of this pamphlet.

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

sin or stain of sin upon it is admitted at once into Heaven. The soul that appears before God in the state of Divine Grace free from greivous sin but still soiled with slight sin or carrying a debt of temporal punishment for sins that have been forgiven and for which full satisfaction has not yet been made must retire to Purgatory until it has properly prepared itself for the company of the Saints and the countenance of God.

Temporal punishment due to sin that has been forgiven—what is meant by that?

We distinguish two things in sin, guilt and punishment. The removal of the one does not necessarily imply the removal of the other. The Scriptures tell us that God pardoned Adam his sin of disobedience; and yet in penance and punishment Adam had to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow and ultimately undergo death. And thus it is with every sin. Besides the forgiveness of the guilt and eternal punishment due to sin there always remains some temporal punishment left for us to do. This temporal punishment may be performed in this life by means of prayer, penance, suffering, fasting, almsdeeds, and the like. If this temporal punishment is not taken care of fully in this world then it must be made good in the next before the soul that is otherwise in Grace can claim admittance into the Presence of God. By way of illustration, take the case of a man who has neglected his duties as a Christian for many years. He is pardoned on his deathbed but has no time to

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

do further penance for his sins. But penance must be done either here or hereafter. He cannot do it in Heaven; he has escaped Hell. There must be some other place then in which the requisite penance may be performed and that place we call Purgatory. Since many people then die in slight sin and others die without having fully paid the debt of temporal punishment due to their sins, it is only logical as well as scriptural to conclude that there must be an intermediate place of purgation in the next world where these sins may be expiated and this punishment completed.

How long will the soul have to remain in Purgatory?

The soul consigned to Purgatory will have to remain there until the Justice of God is fully satisfied. Indeed, this would be a fair definition of Purgatory—a place where the injustice of man is adjusted to the Justice of God, to the Justice of God tempered by the Love of God.

To this we might add another thought, namely, that Purgatory is also a place where the injustice of man to man may be readjusted. Referring to this subject in one of his radio addresses, Dr. Sheen remarks, "Most men are quite unconscious of the injustice and the ingratitude of their lives, until the cold hand of death is laid upon one whom they love. Then only do they begin to realize something of the coldness, and unkindness, and lack of love in their lives. The bitterest tears are shed over the grave

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

just because of words left unsaid and deeds left undone. The child never knew how much I loved her. He never knew how much he meant to me. I never knew how dear she was to me until she was gone. How differently we would act if the dear departed one could come back again. But our regrets are too late; they are in vain. Oh, no. They are neither too late nor in vain. The place we call Purgatory enables hearts that are left behind to break the barriers of time, to manifest a love that is stronger than death, to convert unspoken words into audible prayers, unburned incense into sacrifice, unoffered flowers into alms, and undone acts of kindness into help for eternal life. Take away Purgatory and how meaningless would be our Memorial and Armistice days, when we keep in memory the memory of the dead. Take away Purgatory and how empty our wreaths, our bowed heads, our moments of silence. But if there be a Purgatory, then immediately the bowed head gives way to the bent knee, the moment of silence to a moment of prayer, the wreath of faded flowers to the offering of the unfailing Sacrifice of the Cross. Only the Christian can fully appreciate what all this means to the broken heart of man."

How can we help the souls in Purgatory?

"It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins" (2 Mach. 12, 46). In keeping with this principle of prayer we Catholics follow our beloved dead beyond the veil. We know that in life they were

AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

human and may have been guilty of many little faults that will not stand the scrutiny of an all-holy God. But we know too that God in His goodness has devised an intermediate state of purgation where those who die free from mortal sin but still not entirely ready for that place wherein nothing defiled may enter may prepare and perfect themselves for the all-holy Presence of God. Knowing all this and knowing too that our prayers can hasten for them that happy day we have Masses said for them and beg God to apply to them in unbounded measure the merits of the crucified Christ; we offer up our own good works and seek to gain indulgences with the same end in view; we pray unceasingly that God in His mercy may grant them speedily eternal rest and peace and glory. What comfort and consolation all this to the grief-stricken soul of man! Alfred Tennyson, though not a Catholic, has caught the spirit of the Church and expressed her mind on this matter in the following beautiful words:

I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure. But thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
That this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep and goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands in prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
For so, the whole round earth is every way
Bound by chains of gold about the feet of God.

(Morte d'Arthur).

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