

Dedication

T*o my parents, Josephine and William Gilligan,
who introduced me to the devotion to the holy
souls. May their souls and the souls of all the
faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest
in peace.*

Devotion to the Holy Souls in Purgatory

by

W. Doyle Gilligan

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Contents

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All who die in God's grace and friendship are assured of their eternal salvation; those souls not yet perfectly purified undergo a purification after death, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Preface

November is the month—the last in the liturgical season—in which the Church invites us to a special commemoration of the dead and leads us to meditate on death, particularly our own death. However, we must remember, as does the Church, to pray for our faithful departed during the other eleven months. In so doing we will also remember our own last end.

In praying for the holy souls in purgatory we are brought closer to God; we become more active members in the Communion of Saints and we realize more and more that our stay on earth is just a preparation for our life in eternity.

This little book has been put together to point out the great benefit those receive who have devotion to the holy souls, and to help develop this devotion that ultimately focuses our living the divine realities. It is not a devo-

tion that is out on a limb, so to speak. It is an integral part of the spirituality of the Catholic Church.

All over the world this devotion has been fostered, but perhaps, after Vatican II there has been a decline. However, it was not forgotten by the council. *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) #50 says:

Very much aware of the bonds linking the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the pilgrim Church, from the very first ages of the Christian religion, has cultivated with great piety the memory of the dead. Because it is 'a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' (2 Mac 12:46), she has also offered prayers for them.

The book talks about indulgences, also very much a doctrine of our Church—then, now and for always—showing how we can apply this to the souls in purgatory. I have included the prayers and occasions through which we may gain plenary indulgences and apply them to our loved ones who have gone before us with the sign of peace. To understand indulgences more fully I have included the Apostolic Constitution *The Doctrine of Indulgences*..

Since the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the great prayer of the Church, for the living and the dead, I have also included the three masses of All Souls Day. Holy Mass aids the holy souls more than prayers and indulgences, more than fasting, alms-giving, more than works of charity and piety offered for them by virtue of the Communion of Saints. Holy Mass offered for them is never ineffectual.

There are questions and answers on the Communion of Saints, indulgences and purgatory. I have included a chapter on purgatory from *This is the Faith* by Rev Francis J. Ripley and one from *In Conversation with God* by Rev Francis Fernandez.

My hope for the book is that it will encourage the reader to deepen his or her devotion to the holy souls and spread the word so that there will be an explosion of prayer for the dead.

Now we may gain one plenary indulgence per day, except on the day of our death, when two may be gained. How many Catholics take advantage of this great privilege which our Mother the Church gives to us? A friend of mine suggested that we should apply the first plenary indulgence, each month, to ourselves and then apply all the others to the souls in

purgatory. What a wonderful way to remember our loved ones who have died—our parents, our grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, our friends; all who, in life have in some way touched our lives or crossed our paths.

Those who are sick or suffering have a wonderful opportunity to help the souls in purgatory. They can unite their pain with the Passion of Christ and offer it up for the release of the holy souls, who in turn will help the sick and suffering here on earth.

W. Doyle Gilligan
April 1, 1994

Introduction

Before we go into the devotion to the souls in purgatory we must first consider purgatory and the reason for its existence. For a soul to enter into the beatific vision of God it must be completely pure. While the guilt of sin and its eternal punishment is remitted in the sacrament of Penance, the temporal punishment due to sin is not always remitted entirely in the sacrament of Penance, as it is in Baptism. This remaining temporal punishment, as long as it is not remitted, must be suffered in this world or in the next, in purgatory, before the soul can enter heaven. The holy souls have a great desire to appease God's justice. Their desire is so great, that not only do they not decline to suffer, but they would consent to their very annihilation for the greater glory of God; for God's will is their will.

It is through the infinite mercy of God, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ,

that he created, in the next world, a place of purification for those who, at the time of their death, are not completely pure. This place is purgatory. The Church vindicates the doctrine of purgatory by her councils throughout the ages and reaffirmed it at the Council of Trent. By the declaration of this dogma the Church did not invent a new doctrine, but simply sustained and made an authentic declaration of the faith founded on ancient tradition and on Holy Scripture. "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins" (2 Mac 12:46). Direct or indirect references to purgatory can be found many places in the Old and New Testaments. Among the places in the New Testament are Matthew 12:32; Luke 12:58 ff; 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 1 John 5:16 and Revelations 5:3-13.

The holy souls in purgatory are never forgotten by the Church, because in every Holy Mass celebrated throughout the world they are remembered. In writing about the Mystical Body of Christ – (the Church in heaven, on earth and in purgatory) Pope Pius XII said:

No member of this venerated Body must be forgotten in this common prayer; and let there be a special remembrance of those who are weighed down with the

sorrows and afflictions of this earthly exile, as also for the suffering souls in purgatory (*Mystici Corporis*, #101).

The sufferings of Christ are more than enough to make atonement for all the sins of the world, but God requires that, as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, we must add our prayers, works and sufferings to those of Christ's passion and death in expiation for our sins. From the doctrine of the Mystical Body we see that the merits of one member can help another. Christ's merits belong to the Body of which he is the head, as do all the merits of all the Saints and holy souls who have ever been members of the Church. And so the Church has at her disposal an infinite treasury of merit. Christ gave the Church the power of binding and loosing. She therefore, has the right to loose or remit the expiation due to God by a sinner after the guilt of sin has been forgiven. The Church remits this punishment due to sin by, among other ways, granting indulgences.

An indulgence is therefore the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sin, whose guilt has already been forgiven, a remission which one of the faithful, properly disposed and under certain definite conditions, can acquire through the Church, which

as minister of the Redemption authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasure of the satisfaction of Christ and the saints. It is a matter of faith that the Church has power to grant indulgences (Council of Trent, 25th session).

In *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read:

The Church gives the name purgatory to that final purification of the elect, which is quite distinct from the punishment of the damned (#1031). From the earliest times the Church...has offered prayers for the dead, particularly the Eucharist Sacrifice...The Church also recommends alms, gaining of indulgences, and penances for the benefit of the dead (#1032).

Participation in the Holy Mass and in the sacraments is not added to with indulgences because of the "sanctifying and purifying efficacy, which the Holy Mass and the sacraments have in themselves." Talking about the Holy Mass, St Bridget said:

Let us remember that one mass heard during life is of more benefit to the soul than many heard for it after death, and that every mass will go with you to Judgment and pleas for pardon. They will, moreover, shorten your purgatory

and win for yourself a higher degree of glory in heaven.

Pope John Paul II, speaking on the feast of All Saints, in 1992, said:

The world has an urgent need for a springtime of holiness to accompany the efforts of the new evangelization and to offer the people of our day, who are so often disappointed by the empty promises and tempted to discouragement, an indication of the meaning and reason for renewed confidence.

The sons and daughters of the Church are called to respond to this challenge through a serious, daily commitment to become holy 'in the conditions, duties and circumstances of their life...showing forth in that temporal service the love with which God has loved the world' (*Lumen Gentium*).

In this tiring but exhilarating spiritual journey we are aided by our brothers and sisters in Paradise, to whom we are tied not merely by a pious memory but by a profound, vital communion effected by the Holy Spirit, who ceaselessly builds up the Church as the Body of Christ. It is a communion which is

extended also to those who died in the sign of faith but who, in need of the heavenly Father's purifying mercy, are waiting in purgatory to be able to enjoy the light of his countenance. In a mysterious exchange of gifts they intercede for us and we offer them our prayers and sufferings.

1

De profundis

The De Profundis, Psalm #129 is the sixth of the Penitential psalms and is used in the liturgy as a prayer for the faithful departed. The psalmist, in deep sorrow, cries to the Lord, begging pardon for his sins. As he trusts in God's mercy, so also should Israel wait in hope for the Lord's redemption.

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to my voice in supplication:
If you, O Lord, mark iniquities,
Lord, who can stand?
But with you is forgiveness
that you may be revered.
I trust in the Lord;
my soul trusts in his word.
My soul waits for the Lord*