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Purgatory

MDP of God

Several years ago I came across this story and I thought I’d share it with you today-I’ve used in the RCIA classes for the last several years—but I think it’s a great story that gives us insight into our 2nd reading today

"THE SILVERSMITH"

Some time ago, a few ladies met to study the scriptures. While
reading the third chapter of Malachi, they came upon a remarkable
expression in the third verse: "And He shall sit as a refiner and
purifier of silver" . (Malachi 3:3).

One lady decided to visit a silversmith, and report to the
others on what he said about the subject. She went
accordingly, and without telling him the reason for
her visit, begged the silversmith to tell her about the
process of refining silver. After he had fully described
it to her, she asked,

"Sir, do you sit while the work of refining is going on?"

"Oh, yes ma'am," replied the silversmith; "I must sit
and watch the furnace constantly, for, if the time
necessary for refining is exceeded in the slightest
degree, the silver will be injured."

The lady at once saw the beauty and comfort of the
expression, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

God sees it necessary to put His children into the furnace;
but His eye is steadily intent on the work of purifying,
and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best
manner for us. Our trials do not come at random, and
He will not let us be tested beyond what we can endure.

Before she left, the lady asked one final question,
"How do you know when the process is complete?"
"That's quite simple," replied the silversmith.

"When I can see my own image in the silver, the refining process is
finished."
-Author Unknown

My friends, in my mind that certainly describes what we Catholics call Purgatory- the doctrine of Purgatory of course is the Catholic belief that many of us will need purification before we enter into the glory of heaven

And of course after being totally purified we will truly *reflect the image of Jesus*

And I bring that up because there’s a line in today’s 2nd reading that teaches us the reality of Purgatory

In our 2nd reading today it’s telling us what we’re apart of as Christians-*and in this passage it’s contrasting what we have drawn close to as opposed to the OT*—and it’s saying **how much better the new covenant is to the Old** --It says that---“… you’ve approached Mt Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, **and the spirits of the just made perfect**, and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant…”

I love this passage *because it’s so Catholic*- notice as Christians we don’t just draw close to Jesus or God the Father- we draw close to the angels – we draw close to the saints in heaven—*and we draw close to one another*

You see Jesus didn’t die on the cross only for us to grow close to Him (although He does want us to grow close to Him)---but He died on the cross so that we could also draw close to each other—to the saints in heaven—and to the angels as well

There are many outside the Catholic Church who will say – why do you go to the saints? \_Why do you go to Mary? – all you need is Jesus- all you need is God

In saying that they fail to recognize that ***God’s plan*** *is a family plan-- --His plan is for us to draw close to the angels and saints* [I spoke of this two weeks ago in my homily]

But what I want to focus on is that line that indicated that we’ve grown close to “***the spirits of the just made perfect***” [Hebrews 12:22-24—esp. vs 23]

 How are the spirits of the just made perfect?

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You know all of us in this church today are in a relationship to Jesus – all of us believe in God – most of us here have been baptized- *but none of us is perfect*- at least I know I’m not

[Although I do remember one time talking to a lady who didn’t like what I was saying to her and she told me I was a “perfect idiot” – although she didn’t use the word idiot, but it had a similar meaning]

But in reality – even though we have faith – even though we believe – *most of us are far from perfect*

But the bible speaks of *the spirits of the just in heaven* **are made perfect-** *how does that happen?* –**the answer is Purgatory**

Now that process of purification can begin in this life – and often gets very far in this life so that some may not need Purgatory

But for most of us – we’re going to need to process of purification that happens in Purgatory—**so that we’re made perfect**

A one -line summary of Catholic belief on this is that “God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay the way you are”

In other words we all have imperfections – we all have faults and failings – we all have sins that cling to us *and are a part of who we are-* God still loves us despite those faults- *but He loves us too much to let us* ***stay so imperfect***

So God in His love is not going to make us live with those faults, failings and sins for all eternity [**that’s great news**]- He’s going to free us of those things before we enter the glory of heaven—for as scripture says, “nothing unclean will enter heaven” (Rev 21:27)

Now the problem is that those sins and faults and failings are a part of who we are- *so removing those will be painful*

And St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians addresses that

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 that the foundation of our lives is Jesus Christ – for those to be saved there can be no other foundation

But he says, another is now building on it – *and we have to be careful how we build*

We can build with “gold, silver, or precious stones” – that would be our love – our obedience to God’s commands – our sacrifices for others--- *or we can build with “wood, hay or straw”* – that would be our sins- our failure to love- our disobedience to God’s commands- our refusal to sacrifice for God or others

And he says “the Day” will test each person’s work- in most bibles the word Day is capitalized because it’s speaking of the day of judgment

And he says that everyone’s work *will be tested by fire*- and if a man’s work survives – he’ll receive a reward—*if his work is burned up* – he’ll suffer loss, but he’ll be saved as one going through the fire

Well that’s Purgatory- *that’s our souls being made perfect*

Even our good works will be purified – as that story of the Silversmith that I started with indicated

So even our good works might not be totally pure – you know sometimes we do the right thing for the wrong reason – or sometimes we have mixed motivations- you know we do things out of love, but we also want people to think that we’re nice – that we’re good—so the impurities of even our good works need to be purified- the silver and gold in us need to be purified

I also want you to notice that wood burns differently than hay which burns differently than straw

That’s an indication of different degrees of sinfulness- our mortal sins – even after they’re forgiven – will need more to remove from our souls then our venial sins

 Paul says we’ll “suffer loss” – that is, *it’s going to be painful*

Now the saints and great theologians point out that in Purgatory we will have mixed feelings- those areas of sin in our life as they are removed by the fire of God’s love

[and by the way- *that’s the way we want to see it*—the fire of Purgatory is the fire of God’s love purifying us – **it’s not God taking His pound of flesh** because we had too much fun in this life—*it’s God’s love purifying us]*

That fire will be painful – removing those things that are a part of us will be painful—*because they’re part of who we are*

*But at the same time* – **we’ll be liberated from those things** – at the same time we’ll find great comfort and peace as those sins that have weighed us down like a ball and chain will be taken from us

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Now how that pain and that liberation go together we don’t know – and we won’t know it till we get there—but we don’t have to go there – we can respond to God’s grace in this life so that we can be free of all our sins – so that those sins are no longer a part of who we are- so that we don’t need purification--- or at least don’t need much purification

 So as I said before – that process of purification can start here

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Now it’s important that you know that there are many people outside the Catholic Church that don’t believe in Purgatory and who claim that it’s unbiblical

But as I’ve tried to point out – **the idea** of Purgatory is certainly not unbiblical

The word Purgatory is not in the bible – like the word Trinity is not in the bible

But just as **the idea** of the Trinity is in the bible – **the idea** of Purgatory is there too

My friends in our 2nd reading the author of Hebrews implies that *the spirits of the just will be made perfect*- the place that happens is Purgatory

The book of Revelation tells us that nothing unclean enters into heaven – so what if we are still tainted by sin at the end of our lives – how can we enter into heaven if nothing unclean enters heaven? – The answer--*We will be purified of our sins in Purgatory*

The book of Revelation also tells us that there’s a place other than heaven and hell—so we see in Revelation 20 it says, starting in verse 12 “I saw the dead, the great and the lowly, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. Then another scroll was opened, the book of life. The dead were judged according to their deeds [notice how Catholic this is—*our deeds matter*],- by what was written in the scrolls. 13The sea gave up its dead; then Death and Hades gave up their dead. All the dead were judged according to their deeds. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the pool of fire. (This pool of fire is the second death.)

So notice there’s a difference between the “pool of fire” and the place Revelation calls Hades—the “pool of fire” of course is what we call “Hell”--- “Hades” is the Greek word that we would use for Purgatory (Again that’s in Revelation 20)

Some translations of the bible have the word Hades—others translate that as underworld or netherworld

So notice this Hades place has people in it until the end of time—then when it’s no longer needed it’s thrown into the “pool of fire”—or hell---because hell is a spiritual junkyard –junk souls and spiritual realities no longer needed will go there

The bible is clear- there is a place of purification after this life that will prepare us for the life of heaven-where our souls will be made perfect *Personally I look forward to it, because I’m tired of being a sinner*

This doctrine of the Church reminds us that the entirety of our lives matter to God – what we do – the attitudes we form – the way we live – the way we obey or disobey - the way we strive for virtue or fall into sin– the way we love or fail to love (and that would include loving God and loving one another)

**It all matters** – the doctrine of Purgatory gives us hope that even when we’re not all we can or should be in this life– we have the hope of entering heaven after we’ve been purified by the fire of God’s love in Purgatory

Amen? Amen