

Purgatory

We pray for the dead because we believe our prayers can help those in Purgatory, where one makes reparations for the sins they have committed in life. It is important to note that forgiveness and reparation (a kind of “repairing”) are two different things as this example shows:

When a boy accidentally breaks the neighbor’s window playing ball, the owner of the house forgives him for his carelessness, but still expects him (or his parents) to pay for the window. This payment is “reparation,” which repairs the damage.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), we are *forgiven* the sins we confess, when the priest gives us absolution, but we are still given a *penance* to do after we leave the confessional. The penance is to help us make reparation for our sins after they have been forgiven. Any reparation that is left undone when we die is completed in Purgatory. Sometimes we refer to this “reparation” as the “temporal punishment due for our sins.” The idea that we may still be punished (as a form of reparation) for sins we have already been forgiven, is clearly shown in the Bible:

“O LORD, our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, though you punished their offenses.” Psalm 99:8

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

1030 All who die in God's grace and friendship, but 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... Scripture speaks of a cleansing fire:

St. Gregory the Great speaking on Mt 12:31 said, “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.”

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." From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers... for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

St. John Chrysostom, speaking on Job 1:5 said, “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.”

Other quotes from the Bible and the Early Fathers of the Church

The Early Fathers spoke of a place after death where expiation is made for sins. St. Paul also speaks of such a place in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 he says:

“If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire (itself) will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.”

Tertullian: “The faithful widow prays for the soul of her husband, and begs for him in the interim repose (Purgatory) ... and offers prayers on the anniversary of his death (*Monogamy* 10 [A.D. 213]).

Origen: “If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones (1 Cor. 3); but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into heaven with your wood and hay and stubble and thus defile the kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood, hay, and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions and then returns to us the reward of our great works. (*Homilies on Jeremiah* 13: 445, 448 [A.D. 244]).



WHY DO CATHOLICS PRAY FOR THE DEAD?

By Fr. Joe Scott, May 18, 2008

The earliest Scriptural reference to prayers for the dead comes in the second book of Maccabees. The books of Maccabees were among the latest written books found in the Old Testament. They recount the struggle of the Jewish people for freedom against the Seleucid Empire, around 100-200 years before the birth of Christ. They are written from an Orthodox Jewish point of view. The second book of Maccabees tells how Judas Maccabee, the Jewish leader, led his troops into battle in 163 B.C. When the battle ended he directed that the bodies of those Jews who had died be buried. As soldiers prepared their slain comrades for burial, they discovered that each was wearing an amulet taken as booty from a pagan Temple. This violated the law of Deuteronomy and so Judas and his soldiers prayed that God would forgive the sin these men had committed (II Maccabees 12:39-45).

This is the first indication in the Bible of a belief that prayers offered by the living can help free the dead from any sin that would separate them from God in the life to come. It is echoed in the New Testament when Paul offers a prayer for a man named Onesiphorus who had died: “May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day” II Timothy 1:18). The cave like tombs under the city of Rome, which we call catacombs, bear evidence that members of the Roman Christian community gathered there to pray for their fellow followers of Christ who lay buried there. By the fourth century prayers for the dead are mentioned in Christian literature as though they were already a longstanding custom.

The practice of praying for the dead is rooted first in Christian belief in the everlasting life promised in Jesus' teachings and foreshadowed by his disciple's experience that God had raised him from the dead. After death, even though separated from our earthly body, we yet continue a personal existence. It is as living persons that God invites us into a relationship whose life transcends death.

Praying for the dead has further origins in our belief in the communion of saints. Members of this community who are living often assist each other in faith by prayers and other forms of spiritual support. Christians who have died continue to be members of the communion of saints. We believe that we can assist them by our prayers, and they can assist us by theirs.

Our prayers for the dead begin at the moment of death. Often family members will gather in prayer around the bedside of the person who has died. The Order of Christian Funerals includes a Vigil Service for the deceased, which can be held in the home, in the church, or in a funeral home chapel, the funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal (which generally takes place at the burial site). The prayers express hope that God will free the person who has died from any burden of sin and prepare a place for him or her in heaven. Death remains a mystery for us—a great unknown. Yet Christian language evokes a hopeful imagination in the presence of death, an assurance that our love, linked to Christ’s love, can help bridge whatever barriers might keep those whom we love from fully enjoying the presence of a loving and life-giving God.

[illegible]

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

958 *Communion with the dead.* "In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them." Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.

1030 All who die in God's grace and friendship, but 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. 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:

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.

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." 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.⁶¹⁰ 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.

In light of recent remarks by Pope Francis on homosexual unions and other writings of his, some are questioning if he is changing some of the doctrines of the Church. Hopefully this insert will explain what a pope can and cannot change.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE (From the Divine Office) by Saint Vincent of Lerins, priest

Is there to be no development of religion in the Church of Christ? Certainly, there is to be development and on the largest scale... But it must truly be development of the faith, not alteration of the faith. Development means that each thing expands to be itself, while alteration means that a thing is changed from one thing into another.

The understanding, knowledge and wisdom of one and all, of individuals as well as of the whole Church, ought then to make great and vigorous progress with the passing of the ages and the centuries, but only along its own line of development, that is, with the same doctrine, the same meaning and the same import.

The religion of souls should follow the law of development of bodies. Though bodies develop and unfold their component parts with the passing of the years, they always remain what they were. There is a great difference between the flower of childhood and the maturity of age, but those who become old are the very same people who were once young. Though the condition and appearance of one and the same individual may change, it is one and the same nature, one and the same person.

The tiny members of unweaned children and the grown members of young men are still the same members. Men have the same number of limbs as children. Whatever develops at a later age was already present in seminal form; there is nothing new in old age that was not already latent in childhood.

There is no doubt, then, that the legitimate and correct rule of development, the established and wonderful order of growth, is this: in older people the fullness of years always brings to completion those members and forms that the wisdom of the Creator fashioned beforehand in their earlier years.

If, however, the human form were to turn into some shape that did not belong to its own nature, or even if something were added to the sum of its members or subtracted from it, the whole body would necessarily perish or become grotesque or at least be enfeebled. In the same way, the doctrine of the Christian religion should properly follow these laws of development, that is, by becoming firmer over the years, more ample in the course of time, more exalted as it advances in age.

In ancient times our ancestors sowed the good seed in the harvest field of the Church. It would be very wrong and unfitting if we, their descendants, were to reap, not the genuine wheat of truth but the intrusive growth of error.

On the contrary, what is right and fitting is this: there should be no inconsistency between first and last, but we should reap true doctrine from the growth of true teaching, so that when, in the course of time, those first sowings yield an increase it may flourish and be tended in our day also.

Summary

Church doctrine can develop into a clearer understanding, but never be reversed to mean exactly the opposite.

Practical Implication

Anything a pope says or publishes MUST be understood as NOT contradicting or reversing established Church doctrine that has been definitively proclaimed by the Church for 2,000 years. The Pope simply does not have the power to change doctrines that have already been defined by previous popes. If the Pope could CHANGE Church teaching to mean exactly the opposite of what has been already definitively taught, then his voice would not be infallible, for the next pope could then change what he taught. Church teaching can be fine-tuned, but NEVER changed to mean exactly the opposite of what was previously taught in a definitive and authoritative manner.

Important Note

Not everything a pope says is infallible. There are very specific criteria for what qualifies as “infallible teaching” (see reverse). A pope could even speak heresy in his private remarks or teachings and there are historical examples of this.

From Lumen Gentium paragraph 25

“And this is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, by a definitive act he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals. And therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, since they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to him in blessed Peter, and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person, but as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom the charism of infallibility of the Church itself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith. The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter. To these definitions the assent of the Church can never be wanting, on account of the activity of that same Holy Spirit, by which the whole flock of Christ is preserved and progresses in unity of faith.”

So papal infallibility requires:

- 1) That the pope not be acting as a private person but in his capacity as the supreme shepherd and teacher
- 2) That the pope make it known that he is acting officially as the supreme teacher of the Church
- 3) An intentional definition as a definitive proclamation of a doctrine of faith or morals (not an offhand comment)
- 4) No contradiction of previous infallible statements, which are by definition “irreformable.”

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 2357-9

“Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.”¹⁴² They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.”

Statement by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith:

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING PROPOSALS TO GIVE LEGAL RECOGNITION TO UNIONS BETWEEN HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS

Paragraph 11 (Conclusion): “The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions. The common good requires that laws recognize, promote and protect marriage as the basis of the family, the primary unit of society. Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behavior, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity. The Church cannot fail to defend these values, for the good of men and women and for the good of society itself.”

The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, in the Audience of March 28, 2003, approved the present Considerations, adopted in the Ordinary Session of this Congregation, and ordered their publication.