



What is Purgatory? Can I avoid Purgatory?

A child is told not to play ball in the living room. The child ignores the command, plays ball and breaks a statue. The child is sent to their room, phone privileges are taken away and the child must pay for the statue. It may appear the child was not forgiven because the child was punished. This is not the case. The opposite of forgiveness is condemnation. The child was not condemned and not cast out of the home. The child was forgiven. But there had to be consequences or the child would do it again. There also needed to be some “penance” to restore order.

Purgatory must exist. *“Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy”* (Leviticus 19:2). The Apostle Paul tells us that we cannot be in the presence of God unless we are holy, *“Strive...for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord”* (Hebrews 12:14). The Apostle John, speaking of Heaven, says *“nothing unclean will enter it”* (Revelations 21:27). Forgiveness removes eternal punishment, but leaves a stain of sin. That stain must be removed.

Some say Jesus wiped away our sins and paid the price, so we are holy and there is no stain of sin. These words are not found anywhere in Scripture, and are mere interpretations by some non-Catholics. Did the crucifixion of Jesus really wipe out every sin, even future sin? Can one really get drunk every day, ignore going to church and have marital affairs; and still receive the same judgement at death as Mother Teresa? God is a just judge.

Purgatory is Scriptural. Paul tells us that those who build on the foundation of Christ will have their works tested on the Day (of judgement). Those whose works are burned up *“will be saved, but only as through fire”* (1 Corinthians 3:13). The fire is Purgatory. Jesus says we will *“pay the last penny”* (Matthew 5:236).

In the second book of Maccabees, some Jews who died in battle were found with good luck charms around their neck. Judas prayed for the dead that their sin would be wiped out. *“Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin”* (2 Maccabees 12:46). If a soul goes immediately into eternal paradise or punishment upon death, there is no need to pray for the dead. This verse is clear proof Purgatory must exist.

Purgatory is a gift from God. *“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”* (Catechism, 1030). Purgatory is not a second chance and not a punishment. It seems hard to believe that burning in fire is a gift. Those in Purgatory suffer more than anything we can imagine. But they also have the joy of knowing their salvation is assured. The Lord is waiting for them. This is ultimate joy.

Saint John Vianney was walking down the street and saw a woman he never met before. He walked up to her and told her not to despair, as her husband repented just after jumping off the bridge and was in Purgatory. But he needed her prayers. Even someone who commits suicide, but repents at the end, can be saved. This is a gift.

Pray for those in Purgatory. Those in Purgatory need our prayers, as in Maccabees and John Vianney. The whole body of Christ helps each other. We pray for their purification and release from Purgatory. Then they pray for us.

Purgatory can be avoided. Purgatory is not necessary if we are purified in this life. Purgatory can be avoided if there is: 1) no unrepented sin, 2) full penance paid and 3) no attachment to the world. The best way to avoid Purgatory, or spend less time there, is to live a holy life and frequently receive the Sacraments. Attend Mass weekly and go to Reconciliation often. Jesus gave power to the Apostles, and priests, to forgive sins. *“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained”* (John 20:23). If Jesus did everything on the cross and there was no Purgatory, then He would have no reason to give His Apostles the power to forgive sins.

Meditation:

- In what ways do I take my salvation for granted and presume upon God’s mercy?
- What attachments to the world and to sin are leading me into Purgatory? How can I reject them?
- How can I find time to pray for the souls in Purgatory? How can praying for them help me spiritually?
- What pain and suffering in my life can I offer as a prayer for those in Purgatory, to lessen their suffering?