



Holy Souls Sodality

For Heaven's Sake

www.PrayForSouls.org

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 9 † SEPTEMBER 2012

Dear Members,

I believe that a number of you are very interested in St. Thérèse of Lisieux, "the Little Flower," after reading *Consoling the Heart of Jesus* by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC. She has much to teach us about consoling Jesus. And September is an ideal time for us to explore what this Doctor of the Church also teaches about purgatory, since her feast day is Oct. 1.

So imagine my excitement when I recently came across this article by Father Dr. Hubert van Dijk, ORC, titled *The Teaching of St. Thérèse Of Lisieux on Purgatory*. In the article, Saint Thérèse teaches that a complete trust in Jesus will keep us from purgatory. Here is an excerpt:

'One does not need to go to purgatory'

Little Thérèse's theology is a theology that springs from life, a theology of experience. She received a fervent Catholic upbringing at home, in her parish community, as well as at the school of the Benedictine nuns in Lisieux, and thus, she was familiar with the teaching of purgatory. Being lead by the Holy Spirit, thoughts, notions, and ideas developed which finally became, "The Teaching of the Little Flower on Purgatory."

The common teaching within the Church is that purgatory can hardly be avoided. While still only a novice, the saint commented about this with one of the sisters, Sr. Maria Philomena, who believed in the near impossibility of going to heaven without passing through purgatory:

You do not have enough trust. You have too much fear before the good God. I can assure you that He is grieved over this. You should not fear purgatory because of the suffering there, but should instead ask that you not deserve to go there in order to please God, who



Saint Thérèse says to appear before God empty-handed and emphasizes that trust alone is enough. After a "messed-up" life, God can still take one straight to heaven if the dying person only has trust.

so reluctantly imposes this punishment. As soon as you try to please Him in everything and have an unshakable trust, He purifies you every moment in His love, and He lets no sin remain. And then you can be sure that you will not have to go to purgatory.

She even said we would *offend* God if we didn't trust enough that we would get to heaven right after dying. When she found out her novices talked occasionally that they would probably have to expect to be in purgatory, she corrected them, saying: "Oh! How you grieve me! You do a great injury to God in believing you're going to purgatory. When we love, we can't go there."

Now, this is a new doctrine, but only for those who don't know God, who are not childlike, who don't trust. It is so correct to see things this way. It is true that God will judge us at one point, but He is always and first our Father who ... suffers when He has to punish His child and sees its suffering. The child should do His will just out of love and not to avoid punishment. And this really means that God does not want purgatory! He allows that His children suffer, but only *as if He had to look away*.

Once St. Thérèse encouraged her novice Sr. Marie de la Trinité to have the faith that it was possible even for her to get to heaven right away. She wondered, "If I fail even in the smallest things, may I still hope to get straight to heaven?" Saint Thérèse, who knew well the weaknesses of her novice, replied: "Yes! God is so good. He will know how He can come and get you. But despite this, try to be faithful, so that He does not wait in vain for your love."

God is Father rather than judge

Once St. Thérèse had a confrontation regarding this topic with Sr. Marie Febronia, who not only was 67 years old but also was sub-prioress. She had heard that St. Thérèse encouraged the novices to believe that they could go straight to heaven. She did not like this as she considered this kind of confidence presumptuous, and thus she reproached St. Thérèse. Saint Thérèse tried lovingly to explain that God was more Father than judge but with no success.

The year had not passed when Sr. Febronia died. Three months later, Sr. Thérèse had a dream that she related to her Mother Prioress and that was then documented: "O my Mother, my Sr. Febronia came to me last night and asked

Continued on reverse →

that we should pray for her. She is in purgatory, *surely* because she had trusted too little in the mercy of the good Lord."

Saint Thérèse's 'doctrine' in 7 key words

1. Purgatory became a rule rather than exception.

The large number of souls who suffer in purgatory and for whom the Church prays daily did not need to go there. If we think in human terms, God does not wish for us to need purgatory. God does not put us here on earth, where we are tested and are suffering after the fall, only to let us suffer again — and much worse — in purgatory. Everyone receives enough graces in order to go straight to God after passing the trials on earth. Purgatory is an emergency entry to heaven for those who have wasted their time. However, what God considered the *exception* became the *rule*, and the *rule* — to go straight to heaven — became the *exception*.

2. To assume the 'inevitable' is a grave error.

Since God does not really want purgatory, He does not want it for me either! But then I also have to not want it! Nobody would risk purgatory by living a mediocre and a sinful life *if they only thought of the intense sufferings there*. The many who carelessly say, "I will probably spend some time there," are gravely wrong. Nobody just spends some time there, one has to suffer there like one has never suffered. One often suffers a long time there also. If the Poor Souls had known on earth what to expect in eternity, purgatory would have remained empty.

3. Purgatory is a waste of time.

This is what St. Thérèse says, "I know that of myself I would not merit even to enter that place of expiation since only holy souls can have entrance there. But I also know that the fire of love is more

sanctifying than is the fire of purgatory. I know that Jesus cannot desire useless sufferings for us, and that He would not inspire the longings I feel unless He wanted to grant them." It is true that purgatory is a wonderful grace, for if needed, without the purification in purgatory, we would not go to heaven. But St. Thérèse is right: At the moment of our death, we already have our place in heaven. Afterwards, there is no growing in grace anymore. Whoever does not go through purgatory does not miss anything.

4. We need a more positive image of God.

We already know that St. Thérèse told her novices that they offended God when they thought they would go to purgatory. That is a very shocking statement: For if this is correct, millions of Christians are offending God or at least hurt Him. And yet this is the case. They are focused only on themselves, thinking that they deserve purgatory. They do not notice God who is by their side and would love to help them so much.

5. Love banishes fear.

The question of whether heaven will follow right after death is a question of trust. God does not need our merits in order to take us straight to Him, but He needs all of our trust. Or the other way around — it is not our sins that can prevent God from giving us this grace but rather our lack of trust. Therefore, we must draw the conclusion that everything depends solely on trust. There is no trust without perfect love. And vice versa, there is no love without trust.

6. The last will be the first.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux tells us she heard that sometimes great saints with many merits come before the judgment seat of God, but they have to go to purgatory because our justice before God is

often unclean. That is why she recommends that we give away immediately all the merits of our good deeds, and that it is better to appear before God empty-handed. When our great hour comes, as St. Thérèse writes to Abbe Roulland, a missionary in China, if only we trust, the Blessed Virgin will obtain "the grace of making an act of perfect love" should we have "some trace of human weakness." Thus, we will we reach heaven immediately after death.

7. A great message.

One can rightfully say that Thérèse is turning all common opinions on purgatory upside down. She wants to appear before God empty-handed and emphasizes that trust alone is enough. After a "messed-up" life, God can still take one straight to heaven if the dying person only has trust. Through trust, she shows the shorter way to heaven to the small and humble. And so many can and will go that way.

(To see the complete text, go to www.franciscan-sfo.org/ap/litfwrpu.htm.)

As we consider the Little Flower's teaching on purgatory, two things come to mind: first, she affirms that there are many souls in purgatory who are suffering terribly; second, most (if not all) of them could have avoided purgatory if they had completely trusted in God's mercy.

The lesson for us is clear: While we continue to offer sacrifices and prayers for the suffering souls, let's commit ourselves anew to trusting in the Lord and His mercy in order to avoid purgatory ourselves. Jesus, I trust in You!



Father Dan, MIC

Tips for September

Remember all those who lost their lives unexpectedly in disasters, wars, or terrorist attacks, especially the victims of the Sept. 11th attacks.

Pass your devotion on to the next generation. As children and young people go off to school, consider

how you can introduce them to praying for the Holy Souls.

During the fall season, as leaves die and fall off the trees, create an autumnal wreath to remember those family members who have passed away.

