

# What Catholics Really Believe

by

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## Chapter 5

### Our Eternal Destiny

## 30. “Everyone is basically good, and almost everyone will go to heaven.”

- Check the news. Now do you really believe this?
- Everything God created is good.
- God gave us all free will. Ever noticed how much it is used and abused?

(God also gave us a conscience. How we are taught develops our conscience.)

- This abuse is called **sin**.
- If we continue to sin to the end we get a ride of the “down escalator”.
- By repenting of our sins (reconciliation or confession) and die in a state of grace the we get to ride the ‘up’ escalator.
- Ever heard of the 144,000? It is a Jehovah Witness teaching.
- Sorry but the Bible doesn’t say outright how many there will be.
- No one knows how many will get to ride the ‘up’ escalator.
- But Christ gave some unpleasant suggestions.
  - o MT 7:14 *“How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”*
  - o MT 22:14 *“Many are invited, but few are chosen.”*
  - o LK 13:34 *“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.”*
- The idea or concept that most people will go to heaven points to a poor understanding of the seriousness of sin.
  - o Also “from a concentration of God’s mercy to the exclusion of His justice.”
- Will God save those that don’t ask to be saved?
  - o God is merciful. But He gives His mercy to those that ask for it.
  - o God doesn’t force His mercy on those that don’t want it.
  - o “Salvation is free gift, which, as with any gift can be declined.”

## 31. “Purgatory is not an essential doctrine, but an optional one, just like limbo.”

- First let’s talk about limbo.

- Limbo: Limbus (Latin: edge, fringe) of heaven.
- Limbo is a scriptural notion
- Limbo is not in the Bible. The word limbo is not there.
- Limbo has been described as a theological attempt to reconcile the notion of baptism.
- There is no defined Church teaching.
- It is a theological speculation
- We, as Catholics, are not required to believe in it.
- This concept we have a choice in.
- Limbo typically comes up when people discuss “what happens to children that die before they are baptized.”
- Protestant teachings:
  - Must make a public profession to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
    - Age of understanding?
    - In many protestant denominations infant baptism is not recognized or practiced.
    - So what does a Protestant minister tell a grieving mother of a 1 year old child that dies?
  - Also a question arises of what happens to the souls of all the poor babies that are murdered through abortion?
  - Personally I don't think God excludes them from heaven. To do so sounds evil. If God is perfect love than how can He do something evil?
    - With this thought I refer back to Job 34: 10-12 *“Therefore, men of understanding, hearken to me: far be it from God to do wickedness; far from the Almighty to do wrong! Rather, he requites men for their conduct, and brings home to a man his way of life. 12 Surely, God cannot act wickedly, the Almighty cannot violate justice.”*

## Purgatory

### III. The Final Purification, or Purgatory

**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.<sup>604</sup> 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.<sup>608</sup> 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.<sup>609</sup>

- Purgatory: This is a defined doctrine of the Church. You must believe in it.
- Purgatory is the name the Church gives to the final purification of the elect.
- Purgatory is a process more than a place. Although as a "place" we can relate to it more realistically.
- Punishment in purgatory is different than punishment of the damned.
- In purgatory we are cleansed and prepared to enter into heaven. How can we enter heaven if our souls are stained with sin? When you were a child did you eat at your mother's table with a dirty face and hands?
- Although not specifically mentioned in the Bible the practice of praying for the dead was taught in Maccabees. Specifically 2 MC 12:46 "*Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.*"
- Also these scripture passages support Purgatory.
  - o Sir 7:37, MT 5:26, MT 12:32, Mt 12:36, Lk 12:59, JN 11:39-44, Acts 9:36-41, 1 Cor 3:13-15, 2 Cor 2:12, Phil 2:10, 2 Tim 1:18, Heb 12:10-11, Heb 12:22-23, 1 Pt 1:7, 1 Pt 3:19, 1 Pt 4:6, 1 Jn 5:16-17, RV 21:27
- Remember although Purgatory is not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures, neither is the Trinity or Incarnation. But Holy Scripture does "square" with both.
- As a convert to the faith and knowing of my past, Purgatory is hope. It is much better than the alternative.

### **33. "The Church dropped its old belief in indulgences – that you can get time off in purgatory by performing some specified religious acts and prayers."**

- Indulgence: "the remission before God of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned."

- Temporal: worldly as opposed to spiritual, secular.

#### **The punishments of sin**

**1472** To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a *double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.

**1473** The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man."

## **In the Communion of Saints**

**1474** The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."

**1475** In the communion of saints, "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things." In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

**1476** We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy.

**1477** "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body."

## **Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church**

**1478** An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.

**1479** Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.

- Remember that forgiveness is separate from punishment from sin.
- Forgiveness is obtained from sacramental confession. But punishment still remains.
- There are two kinds of indulgences.
  - o Partial: removes part of the temporal punishment.
  - o Plenary: removes all of it.
  
- In purgatory there is no sense of time. There are no days or years in purgatory.
  - o So the practice of storing up "days off" purgatory time meant what early Christians got for doing penance for a certain length of time.
  - o What the Church says/teaches is that your temporal punishment would be reduced as God saw fit.

- Partial Indulgence: to receive a partial indulgence you must do these three things.
  1. Recite a prayer or two or do an act of assigned charity.
  2. Be in a state of grace by the completion of the assigned work. Remember part of the prescribed work is confession.
  3. Having a general intention to gain the indulgence.
  
- Plenary Indulgence: to receive a plenary indulgence you must do these things.
  1. Perform the work which the indulgence is attached.
  2. Fulfill these three (3) conditions.
    - a. Sacramental confession
    - b. Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intention of the Pope.
    - c. All attachment to sin, even venial sin, must be absent.
      - i. This last one is the hardest
- If you complete a plenary indulgence all sin and punishment is removed up to that time. If you sin again then that indulgence does not cover that sin. In other words it doesn't carry forward.
- There is a handbook for indulgences.
  - o *Enchiridion of Indulgences*
    - This is Church's official handbook.
- Contrary to what Protestant believe or teach, an indulgence is not a permit to go out and indulge in sinful acts.
- Indulgences are not easy
- God will determine how sincere and honest we were when we completed the indulgence.

Here are the references used:

1. What Catholics Really Believe by Karl Keating
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3. The Catholic Source Book by Rev. Peter Klein
4. Catechism of the Catholic Church
5. United States Catholic Catechism for Adults
6. Compendium - Catechism of the Catholic Church
7. Catholic Questions – Catholic Answers by Father Kenneth Ryan
8. The Catholic Answer Book 3 Rev. Peter M.J. Stravinskas
9. What Does Scripture Say? A Biblical Index to Help Explain the Catholic Faith by Tom Balboa and Joseph C. Bonadiman

Here are websites I used.

1. <http://www.usccb.org/>
2. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>
3. [http://www.vatican.va/phome\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm)