**Purgatory!**

**How can this Mercy of God,**

 **Be  *So*  Misunderstood?**

**Because it was often used**
**as a tool**
**to strike  *fear*  into you,**
**instead  of drawing Hope out!**

Recently someone indicated that  it was just ***easier*** to go to a protestant church that didn’t believe in Purgatory. The **implication** being if they  ignore The Church teaching on Purgatory,  it just will go away. They thought if they  **don’t believe** in it, then they will  **not**be held **liable** to going there.

Someone else said Purgatory was often taught as a scary cruel place where “bad” children might go if they didn’t straighten up. That sounds more like HELL if you think about it.

How do we as **Catholics** gain a **proper** and grateful  **view** of something which was often **burned** into our minds as so **terrible**?

**First** we need to **accept** that it is **real**. Regardless of what you may have heard in the last few decades, The **Church** has not “**done away**” with  Purgatory. So how do we see it for what it really is…a Mercy of God?

We need to realize it is **not** middle ground between Heaven and **Hell**. It is however, a “place” you may rightfully want to **avoid**, but not for the reasons you may think. It’s true it is a state  of suffering but probably not in the way you have been told. The **suffering** in Purgatory is a result of the soul’s **longing** for God. Purgatory was often **depicted** with fire because The **Church** wanted to convey the reality of a holy soul **waiting** to be united completely with God. That “pain” of waiting is worse than fires could every be. Think about the person you love the most in the world and how painful it would be to lose them. That is **not** a ***physical*** pain, is it? It is however,  ***VERY*** real!  Most of us  would prefer physical pain to the **pain of loss** or separation. Even if it was only**temporary** loss or separation.

Next, there is no going to Hell from Purgatory. So  let’s clear that up. It is not a place of**judgment** where your **fate** is decided. Purgatory may be  better thought of as **God’s washroom**. Here is a good way to explain it.

In this **life** we have our human and bodily **senses**. We see, touch, smell, feel, taste, and hear,  the **reality** around us. It is easy to be flooded by these senses and not catch the **spiritual reality** of the  ever present  God who loves us  immensely. At our **death** the soul is separated from the body and it’s bodily senses. We will **perceive** God starkly as all **TRUTH**, the perfection of His being will blow us away. (That is why the old testament folks said no one can see God and live. He is too great! Too **Holy**! Too much love to comprehend in this life.)  In other words when we die,  we will see Him***VERY***  clearly with nothing between us.

**Finally**, after stumbling around in this life, **blinded** by our fallen nature and**temptations** to sin,  our  complete understanding of His love for us will be so evident that we will **desire** immediate and **complete union** with Him.

The **realization** that we were made for this **union** with Him, forever, will be so clear and so **driving**that we will **long** for it in the most **extreme way**. However, if we are aware of our own **imperfections** we may  choose to ***temporarily*** “step away” to better**prepare** ourselves for this ultimate union. God does not **refuse** us so much as **we defer** to a better preparation of our souls to be united with Him **because** His glory is so huge compared to what we can understand and **prepare** for, in this life.

So, **yes**,  there is pain. That  pain of longing. The **separation** from the one who loves you the most. What is the **point** of that longing the purpose of **enduring** that separation?  To free you from the **attachment** to Sin. What does that mean?

Well, think **about** the last time you **sinned**. You probably did not get up first thing in the morning thinking, ” I wonder how I can offend God today?” We **often** choose “The fleeting pleasure of sin” over God’s will for us,  for **just** that reason. Sin has a certain**pleasure**. Whether it’s the desire to gain something, feel something, **control**something, or just the fulfillment of our own feelings of **entitlement**, we sin for the pleasure of it.

The odd little **secret** about our souls is that they **respond** to weakness by becoming**weaker** and they respond to **strength** by becoming stronger. When we **give in** to sin, we become weaker toward that sin. When we **resist** it (with and by the Grace of God) we become **stronger** against it.

So when we are **forgiven** of the **guilt** of the sin, does anything **remain**? Ask yourself an honest  question. Think of the last time you **knowingly**, actively, chose to sin. Now, whatever it was you did, what if tomorrow God spoke to the world and said that was**not** a sin anymore. Would you run back to do it again? Be honest! Would you **seek** the same “pleasure” of that act or **thought** again? If you said **yes**, you are not alone. And that is the **attachment** sin has to you. It’s a good “gut check” isn’t it? To see how you really **feel** about your own sins.

It is not that **Jesus Christ**did not do everything to redeem and **forgive** you, He did! But you must be humble and realize this  **weakness** you have. **If**you are not at the perfect point of **contrition**,  that is to say, you  **hate your  sins** because they separate you  from the one you  love most and who loves you  the most. Then there may be a little**attachment** left that sin has to you. If you do not **desire**with all your heart to run screaming from **temptation** to sin and into the loving arms of your God, then there may be a **little** attachment to sin left in you. Well **congratulations**, you are part of the**human** race.

So, back to **Purgatory**. How will you detach yourself from that  **weakness** toward sin? Could you enter into **Heaven** and be in the presence of God who is all **perfect** love and be dragging in even the **smallest**attachment to sin? Probably not! So what happens if you **die** without being perfect? What happens when you face God with **no excuses**and nowhere to hide that **little** desire to sin? It does not mean you hate God or **want** to go to Hell. It does not mean you are a bad **person**. You are just not ready ***yet*** to be in the presence of **perfect love**. Let’s liken it to **Thanksgiving Dinner** at Grandma’s.

You **arrive** early. You see the wonderful spread of **food**. You smell turkey cooking and fresh bread baking. You see the **grand** table set for everyone you love to be happy together again. But it’s early, **too** early to be seated. So you step outside for an hour or so to play **football**in the side yard with all your cousins. The time **passes quickly** and suddenly Grandma is ringing the dinner bell. You run inside to see, everyone else is**seated**. Everyone else is about to **eat**. Now you really see and smell the fine bird and the **wonderful bountiful spread** of  food that has been **prepared** for you. Not only that, but you have worked up quite an **appetite**. You are heading toward the table when you**catch** sight of yourself in the **mirror**. To your surprise you are covered in **mud and leaves** from the fine football game in the side yard.

You just know you can **not** go sit next to your beloved **Grandma** coated in mud and leaves. So what do you do? You head to the **washroom** and ***prepare*** yourself to be present at the meal.

Does your **Grandmother** hate you? Of course not! Are you **unworthy** to sit with your relatives and eat? Of course not! Was the food bought and prepared with you in **mind**? Yes! Were you **invited** to be there? Yes!  So, what is **stopping** you from sitting down to the feast **except** your own desire to be clean first?  That is **similar** to Purgatory.

The wait for Grandma’s cooking  could ***almos***t be described as ***painful***. Why? Because it ***is*** so ***good***! But your own sense of decorum separates you ***temporarily***    in order to better prepare yourself to be fully integrated with your family and to enjoy the communal meal  with each other.

Out of ***your*** desire not to smell bad and **look** muddy, you take the time away from your**ultimate**union with them, to be **cleansed** of the impediments which keep you from that**great** union of food and family.

With Heaven, God sets the **communal meal**. He sends the invitation. He sends His Son to **redeem**you, to bring you, and make sure you **arrive** at your destination. He is not **demanding** you get cleaned up before you sit down. But **you** are at the ***GREAT TABLE*** with ***all*** your family, ***everyone*** you love, all the holy **angels** and saints. Would you like to take a **moment** and clean up from the **attachments** of sin left over from  this life? Most of us **would**.

Just like Granny’s **washroom** is part of her house and you are still in her **presence**while you are getting cleaned up in the bathroom, in Purgatory you would  still be “in” a**part** of Heaven or an annex to it while in the **process**of being purged of those attachments that you have to sin. When you are **ready** you will join the others at the great **banquet** and you will be completely filled with love forever and ever **without** the least imperfection. Now doesn’t that sound like something **good**?

So be **perfect** even as your Father in Heaven is perfect. Be **Holy**! Try your best to**avoid** Purgatory! But do not fear it if it is  **necessary** to endure it. Just know it is a**mercy** of God to bring you to the most holy and perfect state of the  **beatific  vision**which is Heaven and union with Him **forever**.

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| The Church often expressed ideas in art as a way to catechize people who could not read. Many depictions of Purgatory are scary and harsh. |

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| Fire is often used to portray the pain of suffering souls in Purgatory. |

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| It is ultimately the blood of Jesus Christ (as depicted here) being applied to our attachment to sin which frees or €œpurges € us. How blessed we are to have a God who loved us so much He died for us to make us worthy to be with Him forever! |

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| Do not let scary depictions of Purgatory keep you from the truth about God €™s love and care for your soul. Look at Purgatory (which is a dogma of The Church) as part of the great love and mercy of God, and it will be no more scary than the soap and water that Granny set out in her wash room! Certainly do not let fear drive you from the ***only***Church that Jesus Christ actually started. Be Catholic! Be Holy! |

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