

**Looking for Answers –  
Explore What The Catholic Church Really Teaches –  
Part 10**



**Question:**

Why do Catholics believe in a place between Heaven and Hell called Purgatory? Where is Purgatory mentioned in the Bible?



**Answer:**

The main body of Christians have always believed in the existence of a place between Heaven and Hell where souls go to be punished for lesser sins and to repay the debt of temporal punishment for sins which have been forgiven. Even after Moses was forgiven by God, he was still punished for his sin. (2 Kings or 2 Samuel 12:13 – 14). The primitive Church Fathers regarded the doctrine of Purgatory as one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. St. Augustine, one of the greatest doctors of the Church, said that the doctrine of Purgatory *has been received from the Fathers and it is observed by the Universal Church*. True, the word *Purgatory* does not appear in the Bible, but a place where lesser sins are purged away and the soul is saved yet *so as by fire*, is mentioned. (1 Corinthians 3:15). Also, the Bible distinguishes between those who enter Heaven straightaway, calling them *the church of the firstborn* (Hebrews 12:23), and those who enter after having undergone a

purgation, calling then *the spirits of the just made perfect*. (Hebrews 12:23). Christ Himself stated: *Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing*. (St. Matthew 5:26). And: *Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment*. (St. Matthew 12:36). These are obviously references to Purgatory.

Further, the Second Book of Maccabees (which was dropped from the Scriptures by the Protestant Reformers) says: *It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins*. (2 Maccabees 12:46). Ancient Christian tomb inscriptions from the second and third centuries frequently contain an appeal for prayers for the dead. In fact, the custom of praying for the dead – which is meaningless if there is no Purgatory – was universal among Christians for the fifteen centuries preceding the Protestant Reformation.

Furthermore, ordinary justice calls for a place of purgation between Heaven and Hell. Take our own courts of justice, for example. For major crimes, a person is executed or sentenced to life imprisonment (Hell); for minor crimes a person is sentenced to temporary imprisonment for punishment and rehabilitation (Purgatory); for no crime at all a person is rewarded with the blessing of free citizenship (Heaven). If a thief steals some money, then regrets his deed and asks the victim for forgiveness, it is quite just for the victim to forgive him yet still insist on restitution. God, who is infinitely just, insists on holy restitution. This is made either in this life, by doing penance (St. Matthew 3:2; St. Luke 3:8, 13:3; Apocalypse 3:2 – 3, 19), or in Purgatory.

Also, what Christian is there who, despite his faith in Christ and his sincere attempts to be Christlike, does not find sin and worldliness still in his heart? *For in many things we all offend*. (St. James 3:2). *Yet they shall not enter into it* (the new Jerusalem, Heaven) *anything defiled*. (Apocalypse or Revelations 21:27). In Purgatory the soul is mercifully purified of all stain; there God carries out the work of spiritual purification which most Christians neglected and resisted on earth. It is important to remember that Catholics DO NOT BELIEVE that Christ simply covers over their sinful souls, like covering a manure heap with a blanket of snow (Martin Luther's description of God's forgiveness).

Rather, Christ insists that we be truly holy and sinless to the core of our souls. *Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect*. (St. Matthew 5:48). This growth in sinlessness – in Christian virtue and holiness – is of course the work of an entire lifetime (and is possible *only* through the grace of God). With many this cleansing is completed only in Purgatory. If there is no Purgatory, but only Heaven for the perfect and Hell for the imperfect, then the vast majority of us are hoping in vain for life eternal in Heaven.



Question :

Why do Catholics confess their sins to priests? What makes them think that priests can absolve them of the guilt of their sins? Why don't they confess their sins directly to God as Protestants do?

Answer:

Catholics confess their sins to priest because – as it is clearly stated in Sacred Scripture – God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, authorized the priests of His Church to hear confessions and empowered them to forgive sins in His Name. To the Apostles, the first priests of His Church, Christ said: *Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you... Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained*. (St. John 20:21 – 23). Then again: *Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in Heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in Heaven*. (St. Matthew 18:18).

In other words, Catholics confess their sins to priests because priests are God's duly authorized *agents* in the world, representing Him in all matters pertaining to the Ways and Means of attaining eternal salvation. When Catholics confess their sins to a priest they are really confessing their sins to God, for God hears their confessions and it is He Who, in the final analysis, does the forgiving. Their sins are not forgiven if their confessions ARE NOT SINCERE.

Furthermore, Catholics DO confess their sins directly to God as Protestants do. Catholics are taught to make a good act of contrition at least every night before retiring, to ask God to forgive them their sins of that day. Catholics are also taught to say this same prayer if they should have the misfortune to commit a serious (*mortal*) sin until they are able to go to confession.

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