

Stories About Purgatory

*“It is therefore a holy and wholesome
thought to pray for the dead, that they may
be loosed from sins.”*

—2 Machabees 12:46

Stories About Purgatory

And What They Reveal

30 Days For The Holy Souls

Compiled from Traditional Sources by
An Ursuline Nun of Sligo, Ireland

*“Have pity on me, have pity on me, at
least you my friends, because the hand of
the Lord hath touched me.”*

—Job 19:21

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina

Nihil Obstat: Richard A. O’Gorman, O.S.A.
 Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur: ✠ Francis
 Archbishop of Westminster
 September 14, 1904

First published in 1904, by R. & T. Washbourne, 1, 2 & 4 Paternoster Row, London, and Benziger Bros., New York, Cincinnati and Chicago, under the title *Forget-Me-Nots from Many Gardens, or Thirty Days’ Devotion to the Holy Souls*. Rtypeset, retitled and republished in 2005 by TAN Books.

ISBN: 978-0-89555-799-5

Cover illustration: Detail of stained-glass window *Assumption of Our Lady*. Photo copyright © 1992 Alan Brown. Used by arrangement with Al Brown Photo, 3597 N. Roberts Rd., Bardstown, Kentucky 40004.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina
www.TANBooks.com

2012

REST ETERNAL GRANT
THEM, LORD!

Take we up the touching burden of
November plaints,
Pleading for the Holy Souls,
God's yet uncrowned Saints.
Still unpaid to our departed
is the debt we owe;
Still unransomed, some are pining,
sore oppressed with woe.
Friends we loved and vowed to cherish
call us in their need:
Prove we now our love was real,
true in word and deed.
"Rest eternal grant them, Lord!"
full often let us pray—
"Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine!"

REQUIEM AETERNAM

*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine: et lux
perpetua luceat eis. Requiescant in pace. Amen.*

ETERNAL REST

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let
perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in
peace. Amen.

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FIRST DAY

A DAY OF FERVENT PRAYER THAT MANY SOULS IN PURGATORY MAY BE ADMITTED TO THE JOYS OF PARADISE

ALL SAINTS—All Souls! It was well done to place thus close together these two beautiful solemnities. There is a fitness, too, in this season of the fall of the leaf for such a commemoration of the departed. The flowers and green leaves of May, the yellow harvests and the warm glow of August, would be out of place upon All Souls' Day. Better to sing this universal Requiem when Nature herself has laid aside the garments of her gladness, when the warm blood of youth is no longer coursing through the earth's veins, when the very sunshine seems chill and sad, and the wind through the naked branches is a dirge. But at whatever period they come, All Saints Day [November 1] and All Souls Day [November 2] should come together. And they come together, though one might be tempted, in all reverence, to wish that the order of their coming were reversed. If the commemoration of All Souls came first, we might hope that the suffrages of all the Church Militant on that day, joined with the prayers of all the Church Triumphant, might avail much to the relief of the Suffering Church; might procure the discharge of many, perhaps, among the patient victims detained in that prison house of mercy, and so increase the hosts of those honored in the Festival of All Saints. Or is it only

by a tender afterthought, as it were, that the Church, having rejoiced in the glory of those of her children who have secured their crown in Heaven, turns with affectionate compassion to those others who are not yet *there*, though they are no longer *here*, whose earthly fight is over, but whose heavenly happiness is not yet attained? Would that all who are gone were gone to join that multitude which no man can number, thronging the Courts of Heaven! But so many disappoint the yearnings of the Heart of Jesus. So many live and die as if Jesus had not lived and died for them. And even of those who die in the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, how few are found “with the perfect sheen of Heaven upon them”! How few are pure enough, at once, after closing their eyes upon this sinful world, to open them to the full piercing light of glory, to meet, without shrinking, the all-discerning Eye of the God of Infinite Purity! And we are living under that same Eye, and we are laboring for that Heaven which the Saints have not earned too dearly, and for which the Holy Souls are not undergoing too severe a preparation. Have we worked and prayed during the past year as if we believed this?

These and other general lessons are urged upon us by the twin feasts with which November opens—if, indeed, the 2nd of November can be called a feast—a more eager longing for the society of the blessed in Heaven, a deeper horror for sin, a keener thirst for the glory of God and for the increase of grace and merit in our own souls, and a more intense reverence for the majesty and holiness of God thus “wonderful in His Saints,” and thus rigid in the purification of the Holy Souls.

But there is for each of these solemnities one peculiar object having its counterpart amongst the objects of the other. As All Saints’ Day may well be supposed to offer compensation to such of the blessed as have no special festival during the year, so the suffrages of All Souls’ Day supply what is wanting

in the individual charity of the faithful, and may be devoted chiefly to the most neglected of the Holy Souls—those who have no friends to pray for them. No doubt there are many such: some with no loving hearts to cherish their memory—and even the most loving hearts cannot keep up a practical remembrance of the departed during many years of our short lifetime. The Purgatory of many souls may last very many lifetimes. One who is hardly there now, for he ended a very holy life by a very holy death, said on his deathbed: “Eternity is so long that I think Purgatory must be long, too. You must help me, then, with prayers. Even in religion we are apt to forget our deceased brothers, relying too much on their having died religious.”

Before the month closes which is opening now, may our hearts have grown more pleasing to the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary—more dear to them because more like to them; and, as all belongs to Jesus, let us give to Mary a mother’s share in all the days of our lives, especially in these two sacred days which invite us to love and honor her as Queen of All Saints and Compassionate Mother of the Suffering Souls.

“Ah! turn to Jesus, Mother! turn,
And call Him by His tenderest names.
Pray for the holy souls that burn
This hour amid the cleansing flames.”

—REV. MATTHEW RUSSELL, S.J.

On one occasion as the community over which St. Gertrude presided recited the Great Psalter for the souls of the faithful departed, the Saint prepared herself for Holy Communion, and prayed for these souls with great fervor. She then asked Our Lord why this Psalter was so acceptable to Him, and why it obtained such great relief for the souls, since the immense

number of psalms which were recited and the long prayers after each caused more weariness than devotion. Our Lord replied: "The desire which I have for the deliverance of the souls makes it acceptable to Me; even as a prince who had been obliged to imprison one of his nobles to whom he was much attached, and was compelled by his justice to refuse him pardon, would most thankfully avail himself of the intercession and satisfaction of others to release his friend, thus do I act toward those whom I have redeemed by My death and Precious Blood, rejoicing in the opportunity of releasing them from their pains and bringing them to eternal joys." "But," continued the Saint, "is the labor of those who recite this Psalter acceptable to Thee?" He replied: "My love renders it most agreeable to Me; and if a soul is released thereby, I accept it as if I had been Myself delivered from captivity, and I will assuredly reward this act at a fitting time according to the abundance of My mercy." Then she inquired: "How many souls are released by these prayers?" He answered: "The number is proportioned to the zeal and fervour of those who pray for them." He added: "My love urges Me to release a great number of souls for the prayers of each religious."

A short offering which may be made each morning for the souls in Purgatory:

O my God, deign to accept my every thought, word, and action as a loving petition to Thy mercy on behalf of the suffering souls in Purgatory, particularly _____. I unite to Thy Sacred Passion the trials and contradictions of this day, which I purpose to bear with patience, in expiation for the sins and infidelities which retain Thy children in the purifying flames of Purgatory. Amen.

SECOND DAY

A DAY OF SUPPLICATION FOR
ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

THE month of November, with its devotion to the Holy Souls, comes again to remind us of an essential obligation of charity, binding upon all who care to claim their part in the Communion of Saints—in the great family of Jesus Christ—the elect of God, gathered from East and West. Hearts that truly beat in unison with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary cannot turn away with indifference from that touching cry for help: “Have pity on me! have pity on me! at least you, my friends!” If hitherto we have thought too little of those “who have gone before us with the sign of faith,” if we have been like the rest of men wrapped up in the thought of self, immersed in the trifles of today, forgetful of those whose lives were once closely linked with ours, and *should* be still, now in the month of the Holy Souls we may “rise to better things,” to truer thoughts of life, to a deeper sense of the value of time, to a fuller understanding of the will of God in our regard, and especially to an appreciation, altogether new, of the solicitous service which the Church Militant on earth owes to the Church Suffering in Purgatory.

Not because in serving others we shall most securely serve ourselves, nor yet because we hope to secure the gratitude of Saints who soon will reign with God in Heaven; but because those who are now in the cleansing fires are of our own flesh and blood, our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, we will do what we can to help them from this time forward, regretting if we have been negligent till now. It should be enough for us to know that those who have a claim upon our love are stretching out their hands to us for help, and crying: “*Have pity on me!*”

Yet to remember the dead with anything beyond a transient thought is the exception, and to leave them in God's hands to pay their debt, after making a few feeble efforts to help them in the first days of our bereavement, is the rule. Such conduct is almost as usual as it is unreasonable. Those who thus forget parents and brethren and friends may fear that they will be in their turn forgotten, for God keeps His mercy for the merciful.

While dear friends are with us we flatter ourselves that we love them with a disinterested love; that in doing them good service we are not thinking of ourselves at all; that we are even willing to submit to much inconvenience for their sake. And all the while it is too often our own satisfaction that we seek, even in our self-sacrifice, rendering kind offices, not for sake of the good we do thereby, but for the happiness which accrues to ourselves, as men give alms sometimes from no higher motive than is found in the pleasure of giving. It is not true that all human friendship is thus infected with selfishness, but a great deal of that which looks like the pure gold of charity is not such. The value of our friendship in the present may be estimated by its value in the past. Our treatment of the dead will serve us for the touchstone of the sincerity and purity of our affection. "The heart that has truly loved never forgets."

Those who once were dearly loved—our playmates in childhood, our chosen companions in later life, who sat at the same table, who knelt at the same shrine, who shared our joys and sorrows, and, it may be, now and again spoke to us of death and eternity, with wondering words about that other world, and who then passed from our sight into that other world—are they remembered now? Do we pray for them or to them? Or are they in good truth, if we must be honest with ourselves, really nothing more to us now than faces that look upon us in a dream? Is their connection with us a reality of our present life, or are they merely creatures of the past, belonging to a

state of things which has vanished from our hearts and minds? According to our answer must be the estimate which we form of the generosity with which we love our friends and help our fellow creatures.

The Holy Souls in Purgatory are unutterably dear to God, because of all the graces and merits they have won and can never lose, and because of the keen sufferings which they are bearing with such heavenly patience in their love of Him, and their desire to be more worthy of Him. The Virgin Mother watches with a mother's holy anxiety while the last faint traces and shades of sin fade off from each beautiful soul, longing for the moment when all shall be paid, and these her dear children received into their long-expected happiness. St. Joseph, the particular patron of these patient holy ones, is eagerly looking forward to the moment when he may bear his charges into the Father's bosom. And think you that God and Our Lady and St. Joseph will not love and bless those who by their holy liberality shall hasten that moment which they all so earnestly desire? And when those benefactors shall send their petitions through Purgatory and some dear sufferer shall cry to Heaven, "Grant them what they ask for, for they have done great things for us," can you think the prayer will be unheard?

See what St. Catherine of Bologna used to say on this subject. "When I wish," she said, "to obtain some favor from the Eternal Father, I invoke the souls in their place of expiation, and charge them with the petition I have to make to Him, and I feel I am heard through their means." This ought to be a great encouragement to us, and doubtless it will be. It is such an easy way of pleasing God and winning blessings for ourselves to make little compacts with the suffering souls that we will daily perform some indulgenced exercise for their relief, and that they in return will forward our particular intentions.

Prayer for the Holy Souls is a most fruitful devotion for all,

but especially for those who have lost some dear relation, some friend, or someone in whom they took an intense interest, and who they conjecture may still be detained in the purifying fire. Let me give a few words from the third of Lady Georgiana Fullerton's letters about the "Helpers of the Holy Souls," which relate to this subject:

"Amongst the Helpers of the Holy Souls," she writes, "several have made great sacrifices to God in order to obtain mercy for souls long ago called away from this world. We can all imitate their example. 'Oh, if it were not too late!' is the cry of many a heart tortured by anxiety regarding the fate of some loved one who died apparently out of the Church, or not in the state of grace. We answer: It is never too late. Pray, work, suffer. The Lord foresaw your efforts. The Lord knew what was to come, and may have given to that soul at its last hour some extraordinary graces which snatched it from destruction and placed it in safety, where your love may still reach it, your prayers relieve, your sacrifices avail."

Many religious orders have in all ages distinguished themselves by their works of charity toward the poor, and have on this account received universal approbation; but the monks of Cluny have distinguished themselves by their suffrages for the souls of the faithful departed, for which they have received the commendation of the whole Catholic world. The circumstance is related by Cardinal Baronius as follows: A revelation having been made to several servants of God that many souls were freed from Purgatory through the prayers of the monks of Cluny, who among all the faithful distinguished themselves in this holy exercise, their abbot, St. Odilo, about the year of Our Lord 1040, determined to promote this work of pre-eminent charity to a much greater extent. He therefore ordered that,

besides the ordinary suffrages and prayers which his monks daily offered for the purpose, the Holy Sacrifice should be offered on a certain fixed day in all the monasteries of his Order in behalf of these souls, which custom was afterwards taken up by the whole Church—the Commemoration of the Second of November being thereby instituted.

St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh, conversing one day with his disciples, the subject turned on death, and each person was asked where and when he would like to end his days, supposing it were his fate to die away from his own country. Various were the answers. One person designated such a place and such a time, another a different time and place, each according to his peculiar views and line of reasoning. When it came to the Saint's turn, he said that he would select the Monastery of Clairvaux, a place conspicuous for its love of rule and spirit of fervent charity; and as to the time, he would prefer the day of solemn Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed—to the end, he said, that he might share in the advantage of all the prayers offered on such an occasion in that abode of sanctity. Nor was he disappointed in his desire, for being on his way to visit the Sovereign Pontiff, Eugenius III, a short time after, he became seriously ill on arriving at Clairvaux and perceived that his end was approaching. Then, raising his eyes to Heaven in gratitude, he cried out with the Psalmist: "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it."

On the morning of the 2nd of November the intensity of the fever increased to such a degree that death ensued, and his soul, released from its earthly prison, and accompanied by the fervent prayers of the monks and the faithful, and surrounded by a multitude of Holy Souls whom these suffrages had released from Purgatory, presented itself before the tribunal of Jesus

Christ to receive the crown of eternal glory.

At the obsequies of St. Malachy, St. Bernard, offering a Requiem Mass for the repose of the soul of his holy friend, added to the Mass a Collect to implore the Divine assistance through his intercession, having been assured of his glory by Divine revelation during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice.

THIRD DAY

A DAY OF PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER MOST IN PURGATORY

IT IS certain that a person's sufferings in Purgatory are proportioned to his guilt; and as many are liable to depart this life great debtors to the Divine Justice on account of numerous venial sins and carelessness in atoning for mortal sins, let us this day remember those who *suffer most* in that place of torments.

Were we to say that the suffering endured in Purgatory included all the torments arising from all bodily diseases, we should give a terrifying idea of their violence; but St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and other Fathers say that our conception would fall very short of the reality, since the torments endured there are incomparably greater than those of the most violent diseases, united with all that could be inflicted by every possible instrument of torture. When we read in Church history of what the holy martyrs have endured for the Faith, when we reflect on the torments which the cruelty of barbarians has invented to torture their fellow men, we shudder with horror, we tremble with alarm, and yet the pains of Purgatory, as was revealed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, are incomparably greater.