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The Church Suffering – Purgatory and the Holy Souls

Purgatory is as important to the hereafter as are Heaven and Hell, and, yet, it is not found in the Bible. Or is it? While the Catholic Church acknowledges that Purgatory does exist Protestants do not accept that there is a place in between Heaven and Hell. To be clear, there is a purging of fire mentioned in several verses in the Bible. To wit:

Zechariah 13:9

“This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”

But, where is this purging fire? It cannot be Hell if souls are to be refined. There are some who recognize that there is such a place they refer to as “limbo.” So, what do we really know about Purgatory, commonly known as the “Netherworld” where sinners may be sent after death. (The mythical term “netherworld” refers to an area beneath the earth’s surface, and is also a

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term used to refer to “the world of the dead.”)

The actual name “Purgatory,” though not in the Bible, might be referenced under the alternative name, “Abraham’s Bosom,” which is mentioned in the Bible.

Known as *Sheol* in the Old Testament, the New Testament reference to

Abraham’s Bosom is found in the Parable by Jesus Christ, the Rich Man and

Lazarus in Luke 16: 19-30:

¹⁹ ***“There was a rich man^[a] who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day.²⁰ And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,²¹ who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.²² When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried,²³ and from the netherworld, ^[b]where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.²⁴ And he cried out, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’²⁵ Abraham replied, ‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.²⁶ Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.’***

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We learn from Luke Chapter 16, verses 19 – 26, that “when the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the *bosom of Abraham*,” and when the rich man died, he went to the “netherworld where he was in torment, suffering ‘in these flames.’” It speaks of a “great chasm” lying between one side and the other, preventing souls on each side from crossing over to the other.

Abraham’s Bosom is a Jewish idiom for “paradise.” Jesus, after having died upon the cross, descended into Hades/Hell, for to rescue Moses and Abraham and bring them with Him to Heaven.

As Jesus was dying upon the Cross, two robbers to either side of Him struggled upon their crosses. One man, Gestas, refused to repent while the other, whose name was Dismas, defended Our Lord, to which Jesus then said to him: ***This day you will be with me in paradise.*** Is paradise, then, *Heaven*? We know that Abraham's Bosom is the Jewish term for “paradise,” and we know from the description of Abraham's Bosom that it is a beautiful, peaceful place though not Heaven. Nor is it Hell. Did Jesus bring Dismas to a place of peace and beauty that was not Heaven? (Dismas also known as the “Penitent Thief” later

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was canonized by the Catholic Church. His feast day is March 25th.)

Believe and repent. Two key words important for the salvation of souls.

Purgatory should be carefully understood so that all faithful Christians will bear in mind what it will take to avoid the punishment of purging by fire for sin. To believe in God and to live that belief will save the soul and promise eternity. More than this, souls *must* repent for every sin and be found to be in a *State of Grace* before entering into Heaven, God's Kingdom.

There are many lingering questions regarding Purgatory. *“What is Purgatory and why do we go there after death?” “Why do other Christians not believe in Purgatory?” “Who goes to Purgatory and for how long?”* Amazingly, many of the answers to these questions are given by the souls, themselves, in Purgatory. According to church teaching, Purgatory is a place that exists outside of Heaven and Hell, where souls go to be purified while awaiting entrance into the Glory of Heaven and the presence of God. It can be a place where a soul is given a last chance to repent, having not done so before death.

Over the centuries countless visions and descriptions of Purgatory have

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established confirmable proof of its existence. These accounts are derived from the writings of Roman Catholic Saints, Mystics and clergy, and, in addition, the visions by faithful Catholics, and Christians of other denominations who believed traditionally in only Heaven and Hell.

Such accounts along with avid research helped to determine that not only does Purgatory exist, it's inhabitants can, and do, appear to the living. These are the holy souls who must rely upon help from the living through prayers and memorial masses offered to ease their sufferings while waiting to see God. The Holy Church refers to these souls as "holy" because they have the promise of Heaven awaiting them once they have been *purged* into a state of Grace. Purgatory might, then, be called the "land of lost and found souls," for those lost by sin are to be found by atonement. With God's permission, the holy souls in Purgatory may appear to the living to impart messages to loved ones, to extend warnings, to ask for prayers and remembrance, and to seek closure for untimely, maybe tragic death. For reasons known only to Him, God does allow these holy souls to appear to us and overwhelming proof of this does exist.

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It should be noted here that while the holy souls from Purgatory are, more than likely, the apparitions we see of “ghosts” or the disembodied voices we hear, these souls, spirits, if you will, will not harm us strictly because they have been able to appear by the permission of God, Jesus Christ, Who might allow this in order to help the suffering soul on it's way to healing and progression. These souls, known to the Catholic faith as *the Church Suffering*, cannot pray for themselves, thus it is, therefore, obligatory that the faithful offer prayers for them and, especially, Masses should be said for them. In turn, we can pray to these holy souls to ask their help in our lives and predicaments. Upon entrance into Heaven, the souls for whom we prayed will remember us with great gratitude.

It is not thoroughly understood why God allows spirits to visit the living, but, clearly, He does. It should also be understood that harmful spirits are not given permission by God to return, and if you encounter such spirits, avoid them. The only souls allowed to return to the living are the holy souls. Those in Heaven do not return as their earthly bonds have been severed and they are peacefully with God beyond our reach. However, they do remember loved ones and pray for us.

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The souls condemned to Hell cannot return for they are lost forever.

Demonic spirits are an entirely different matter. They have been described as the “fallen angels” who roam the earth to create havoc and to coax vulnerable souls upon death to abandon God. These horrible entities can appear as dark shadows or hideous creatures; all sorts of distorted imagery. Demonic possession is very real, as any Exorcist of the Catholic Church will advise, and a vulnerable soul unaware of the consequences of possession by a wicked entity may suffer irreparable damage both to health and well-being. Should possession of some type occur, an ordained Priest who is thoroughly trained in casting out demons and other evil spirits, would need be called in to perform an “exorcism” on the unwitting victim, which, in and of itself, can be a very disturbing process, sometimes bringing tragic consequences. The Holy Church has never denied that demons do exist for mention of them is found in the Bible, specifically, by Jesus, Himself. For this very good reason, the Bible advises us to avoid matters of the occult; witches, spell-casters, magicians, and fortune-tellers, all of those occultists who could conjure up the demons at any given time. (Some newer Bibles may

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add the word “mediums,” however, there are many seers and prophets who, despite having “mediumistic” abilities, and may be noted as “psychics” by modern-day terminology, are actually gifted individuals who have received true gifts from God, including prophecy.)

The Bible refers to demonic entities as “unclean spirits.” Jesus, Himself, came across such “unclean spirits” inhabiting the bodies of the innocent and unsuspecting, and exorcised them instant. We read in Matthew 12: 43-45:

The Return of the Unclean Spirit. *“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation.” When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it passes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ – Luke 11:24*

If we, of the earth, should sense a dark spirit around us or in our homes, by invoking the name of Jesus Christ while reciting the strongest of all prayers, the

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Lord's Prayer, these evil entities will vanish. It is wise to remember that evil spirits must be cast out in the name of Jesus Christ. It is also wise to “test” the spirits when they come calling. Ask for them to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord, come in the flesh. If they respond affirmatively, then they are certainly kindred souls, more than likely those from Purgatory seeking comfort. If the answer is negative, or silent, then the spirit must be cast out.

In The First Letter of John 4: 2-3:

By this you know the spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you have heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

Satan and his minions, even the demons, cannot withstand the power of the Holy Name of Jesus Christ. They know that Jesus, Himself, exorcises unclean spirits by his commanding presence. This is found in Mark 1: 27:

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

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Though it is not always easy to discern a good spirit from the bad without the God-given ability of discernment, we must try, to the best of one's own ability, to reason.

Interest forever abounds in this place called Purgatory, said to be comprised of total darkness, constant fire, and tormented souls. There are plenty of interesting accounts stemming from a variety of sources acknowledging Purgatory's existence and describing where it is located and what it really looks like.

Following are some of these stories from Saints and Mystics as told by Father Joseph M. Esper from his ***Saintly Solutions to Life's Common Problems***:

"In the twelfth century, the famous Irish bishop St. Malachy learned that his sister was destined to suffer a long time in Purgatory, for she had lived a very sinful life before repenting; his prayers eased her sufferings., but did not significantly lessen her time there. In the fifteenth century, the sister of St. Vincent Ferrer appeared to him as she was about to enter Heaven and revealed that had it not been for the many Masses he offered on her behalf, her time in Purgatory would have been much longer."

"A story is told about St. Teresa of Avila in this regard. A priest she knew had just died, and God revealed to her that he would remain in Purgatory until a Mass was said for him in the chapel of a new Carmelite house that was to be built. Teresa hurried to the site and had the workmen begin raising the walls of the chapel immediately, but as this would still take too long, she obtained permission from the bishop for a temporary chapel to be erected. Once this was done, Mass was celebrated there, and while

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receiving communion, Teresa saw a vision of the priest thanking her most graciously before entering God's kingdom."

The descriptions of Sheol/Hades provided by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his ***Summa Theologica*** report four levels to Hades/Sheol... He tells us that *"...the fire of Purgatory is the same as the fire of hell: and hence they are in the same place. Further the Holy Fathers before the coming of Christ were in a more worthy place than that wherein souls are now cleansed after death."*

Still another account specifies *three* levels while other accounts refer to numerous levels and each bearing a different form of punishment. The common thread of these similar descriptions is that it is most convincingly established that there are several levels to Sheol/Hades where a soul could go after death depending upon its degree of sin and absolution for sin, with the top tiers being where most of the holy souls dwell before entering Heaven. So, then, Sheol/Hades sounds a lot like Purgatory, and they are, without question, one in the same.

Self-proclaimed spiritualists over the years have reported seven realms between the earth and moon which tends to replicate the seven levels of consciousness. Spirits whose visitations are well-documented, including those I

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have encountered, have described being present in a place that sounds quite similar to *Paradise*, which we know is not Heaven because the majority of these souls have stated they have not seen God.

The four levels of Sheol/Hades/Purgatory have been formally calculated as being 1) Paradise or Abraham's Bosom, (2) Purgatory 1, (3) Purgatory 2, (4) Gehenna, or Hell. Ultimately, conclusively, we must stay focused on God.

"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." — Catechism of the Catholic Church, *par.* 1030.

First-hand accounts of the confirmed existence of *Purgatory* are very compelling—and, somewhat, frightening. By unanimous description, it is a dark place, where souls atone for sin after death.

From *"An Unpublished Manuscript on Purgatory"* published by The Reparation Society of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Inc., 2002, the testimony of a nun, Sister M. de . L. C. (name kept anonymous) written from 1874 to 1890, describes Purgatory in vivid detail:

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"I can tell you about the different degrees of Purgatory because I have passed through them. In the great Purgatory there are several stages. In the lowest and most painful, it is like a temporary hell, and here there are the sinners who have committed terrible crimes during life and whose death surprised them in that state. It was almost a miracle that they were saved, and often by the prayers of holy parents or other pious persons. Sometimes they did not even have time to confess their sins and the world thought them lost, but God, whose mercy is infinite, gave them at the moment of death the contrition necessary for their salvation on account of one or more good actions which they performed during life. For such souls, Purgatory is terrible. It is a real hell with this difference, that in hell they curse God, whereas we bless Him and thank Him for having saved us.

Next to these come the souls, who though they did not commit great crimes like the others, were indifferent to God. They did not fulfill their Easter duties and were also converted at the point of death. Many were unable to receive Holy Communion. They are in Purgatory for the long years of indifference. They suffer unheard of pains and are abandoned either without prayers or if they are said for them, they are not allowed to profit by them. There are in this stage of Purgatory religious of both sexes, who were tepid, neglectful of their duties, indifferent towards Jesus, also priests who did not exercise their sacred ministry with the reverence due to the Sovereign Majesty and who did not instill the love of God sufficiently into the souls confided to their care. I was in this stage of Purgatory.

In the second Purgatory are the souls of those who died with venial sins not fully expiated before death, or with mortal sins that have been forgiven but for which they have not made entire satisfaction to the Divine Justice. In this part of

Purgatory, there are also different degrees according to the merits of each soul.

Thus the Purgatory of the consecrated souls or of those who have received more abundant graces, is longer and far more painful than that of ordinary people of the world.

Lastly, there is the Purgatory of desire which is called the Threshold. Very few escape this. To avoid it altogether, one must ardently desire Heaven and the vision of God. That

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is rare, rarer than people think, because even pious people are afraid of God and have not, therefore, a sufficiently strong desire of going to Heaven. This Purgatory has its very painful martyrdom like the others. The deprivation of the sight of our loving Jesus adds to the intense suffering."

The beloved Roman Catholic Saint and Mystic, and sufferer of the Stigmata, Saint Padre Pio, testified in 1922 to the Bishop of Melfi of visitors from Purgatory:

"While in the friary on a winter afternoon after a heavy snowfall, he was sitting by the fireplace one evening in the guest room, absorbed in prayer, when an old man, wearing an old-fashioned cloak still worn by southern Italian peasants at the time, sat down beside him. Concerning this man Pio states: 'I could not imagine how he could have entered the friary at this time of night since all the doors are locked. I questioned him: 'Who are you? What do you want?'

The old man told him, "Padre Pio, I am Pietro Di Mauro, son of Nicola, nicknamed Precoco." He went on to say, "I died in this friary on the 18th of September, 1908, in cell number 4, when it was still a poorhouse. One night, while in bed, I fell asleep with a lighted cigar, which ignited the mattress and I died, suffocated and burned. I am still in Purgatory. I need a holy Mass in order to be freed. God permitted that I come and ask you for help."

Saint Pio recalled another visit from a soul in Purgatory:

"One evening, when I was absorbed in prayer in the choir of the little church I was shaken and disturbed by the sound of footsteps, and candles and flower vases being moved on the main altar. Thinking that someone must be there, I called out, "Who is it?"

No one answered. Returning to prayer, I was again disturbed by the same noises. In fact, this time I had the impression that one of the candles, which was in front of the statue of Our Lady of Grace, had fallen. Wanting to see what was happening on the altar, I stood up, went close to the grate and saw, in the shadow of the light of the Tabernacle lamp, a

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young confrere doing some cleaning. I yelled out, "What are you doing in the dark?" The little friar answered, "I am cleaning." "You clean in the dark?" I asked. "Who are you?" The little friar said, 'I am a Capuchin novice, who spends his time of Purgatory here. I am in need of prayers.' and then he disappeared."

A more recent account comes from Father Jose' Maniyangat of St. Mary's Mother of Mercy Roman Catholic Church in, MacClenny, Florida. After a near-fatal accident, Father Maniyangat gave testimony, which appears on the church website, attests that his guardian angel took him to visit God in Heaven, hell, and *Purgatory*. His testimony of his visit to purgatory is as follows:

"... my Guardian Angel escorted me to purgatory. Here too, there are seven degrees of suffering and unquenchable fire. But it is far less intense than hell and there was neither quarreling nor fighting. The main suffering of these souls is their separation from God. Some of those who are in purgatory committed numerous mortal sins, but they were reconciled with God before their death. Even though these souls are suffering, they enjoy peace and the knowledge that one day they will see God face to face. I had a chance to communicate with the souls in purgatory. They asked me to pray for them and to tell the people to pray for them as well, so they can go to heaven quickly. When we pray for these souls, we will receive their gratitude through their prayers, and once they enter heaven, their prayers become even more meritorious."

There are two paths only leading to eternity. One leads us to God, the other to the evil one and...hell. God is continually giving us chances throughout our lives to follow Him and to repent for our sins. Since we are all sinners, it is more a

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difficult journey to follow the path toward the Kingdom rather than ease on down the path toward eternal darkness. The difficult part of the journey toward Heaven is in our selfishness to give glory to ourselves rather than to God. Even if we frequently repent for our sins and are forgiven, does that mean we are forgiven by God? If we are forgiven by God, there would be no *Purgatory* and no suffering. This rest stop along the path to Heaven is as necessary as it is frightening. We fear God and we fear His judgment. However, God, the just Judge, is also a merciful God who loves us unconditionally, and Purgatory is His gift to we sinners who continue to offend Him. He desires to help us find our way home and, therefore, inserts into our lives, both before and after death, significant measures by which we can atone. For the holy souls in Purgatory, it is long perceived that these departed souls can, and do, leave their marks, or signs, to spark awareness of their brief visits to the living. That they are able to do this is a supernatural phenomenon allowable only by the Grace of God.

Fingerprints have appeared on papers and are imprinted in books. Objects having to do with the deceased and the faces of departed loved ones have

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appeared in photographs with the living. These occurrences are not manifestations of satan because the evil one has no power either to interrupt or to intercede in the destiny of the souls in God's care. *Nothing* occurs without God's permission.

Proof of such supernatural occurrences is ever circulating in the world causing many, including members of clergy, to revisit the existence of supernatural phenomena outside of the natural order of things.

Ten minutes outside of the Vatican in Rome, and situate along the Tiber River, exists Chiesa del Sacro Cuore del Suffragio, the Church of the Sacred Heart of the Suffrage, an antiquated church whose chapel was partially destroyed by fire in 1897.

Father Victor Jouet, a French priest of the Order of the Sacred Heart, was pastor at the time of the fire. Years after, while reviewing the damage, Father Jouet discovered on the wall behind the altar what appeared to be the image of a human face bearing a "sad and melancholy" expression. The impression, he thought, could have been made by the intense heat of the flames. This sight

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somehow convinced Father Jouet that the departed soul of one condemned to Purgatory was attempting to contact him. This supernatural manifestation prompted the priest to further investigate, and he began contacting local residents and collecting documents and other memorabilia said to have come from the souls of the dead in Purgatory, this by convinced family members. With the permission of Pope St. Pius X granted to him, Father Jouet traveled “throughout France, Belgium, Germany and Italy”¹ collecting relics believed to be gifts from deceased souls.

Today, Piccolo Museo Del Purgatorio, the Museum of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, remains a unique attraction in Rome. Objects believed to have been sent by souls in Purgatory have found a secure home here inside a small room off the Vestry. Father Jouet put together a most compelling and intriguing collection including Bibles and prayer books, tabletops, and articles of clothing, all of which had been impressed upon or signed by the materialized hands of departed souls.

The Holy Roman Church has yet to provide an official answer as to whether or not

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The Museum of the Poor Souls in Purgatory by Margaret C. Galitzin (traditioninaction.org)

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these objects are authentic, although the Museum still stands and continues to receive many visitors including clergy, the faithful, and the curious.

Witnesses and original owners of many of the objects displayed in this century-old museum, had testified that certain objects did, indeed, come from known loved ones who had died.

Sadly, after Father Jouet's death in 1912, the museum has had no further additions to the collection. Father Jouet passed away inside the museum while reveling in his passion, reviewing the holy artifacts he knew to be true gifts from the departed.

From *"The Amazing Secrets of the Souls in Purgatory -an interview with Maria Simma"* written by Sister Emmanuel Maillard, the testimony of Roman Catholic and Austrian Mystic, Maria Simma:

"In 1940 came the first visit from a Holy Soul (a departed soul from Purgatory) -Maria was age 25. The holy soul--a man-- appeared to her in a vision one night. He was pacing back and forth in her bedroom at the foot of her bed. Confused, she called out to him and said "Who are you?" but she received no reply. Then she hopped out of bed and tried to grasp him saying "How did you get in here? Go away", he gave no response and as she reached out to touch him he disappeared. However, as soon as she got back into bed he reappeared, pacing back and forth once again. She wondered how is it that she could readily see this man, but not speak to or touch him.

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She thought to herself, "Well, so long as he does not come near me" and she remained watching him and after awhile he disappeared and she remained awake pondering the meaning of what happened.

The next day she immediately went to see her parish priest, Fr. Alfons Matt, to tell him all that had happened. After I explained everything to him he said "it could be a poor soul from Purgatory. If such a thing should ever happen again, do not say "Who are you?" but say "What is it that you need from me?"

The next night the man suddenly appeared again, once again pacing back and forth. This time Maria immediately asked "What is it that you need from me?" The man suddenly stopped, turned towards her and replied "Please have three holy Masses said for my intentions and then I will be delivered." And then he immediately disappeared and Maria said "It was then that I knew that he was a poor soul." The next day she once again told her parish priest, Fr. Alfons Matt, what had happened and the three requested masses were said. The good priest also told her to always seek to do whatever she can to help the souls that might come to her. Soon more souls from purgatory would come asking for her prayers and sacrifices, and thus began a lifetime apostolate for the holy souls. Over the next few years, only 2 or 3 poor souls came to her each year, but as time went on, more and more were coming to her seeking her assistance through prayers and sacrifices.

From the onset however it must be noted that Maria never sought visits from the souls in purgatory—she never called upon them or "channeled" them in any way. They always came to her without any seeking on her part. In fact the holy souls have told her that it is God in His great mercy who gives them permission to come to her to obtain sacrifices and prayers that their time in purgatory might be lessened."

From her interview with Sister Emanuel, Maria Simma said the following:

"We are not supposed to summon up the souls - I don't try to get them to come. In spiritism, people try to call them forth. This distinction is quite clear, and we must take it very seriously. If people were only to believe one thing I have said, I would like it to be this: those who engage in spiritism (calling forth the dead, moving tables and other

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practices of that kind) think that they are summoning up the souls of the dead. In reality, if there is some response to their call, it is always and without exception Satan and his angels who are answering. People who practice spiritism (diviners, witches, mediums, etc.) are doing something very dangerous for themselves and for those who come to them for advice. They are up to their necks in lies. It is forbidden, strictly forbidden, to call up the dead. As for me, I have never done so, I do not do so, and I never will do so."

Maria Simma gave testimony that it is not of God to call up the dead, however, she has also acknowledged that souls from Purgatory do visit the living, and that she is one who has heard from them. Maria Simma gave further testimony to Sister Emanuel of the information she had received from the Holy souls in Purgatory, and much of the following further corroborates the aforesaid statements. I have highlighted those of Maria Simma's statements which are similar in descriptions given by the souls of the departed who have appeared to me. Herewith, Maria Simma's further testimony:

"The holy souls have repeatedly told her that the greatest help for them that they can obtain from those here on earth is the offering of holy Mass. Next to the Mass, the holy Rosary and the Stations of the Cross are very beneficial to them. Any sacrifice we make-- even the smallest ones-- offered specifically for them have a great value in the eyes of God, and greatly lessen their sufferings and time in purgatory. The poor souls have told her that even the smallest prayer or sacrifice is like giving a cool glass of water to a parched sojourner travelling in the driest desert.

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*They normally appear to her in their normal clothes, that is, the ones that they most often wore during their lifetime, and they often have the appearance of one earnestly begging and desiring help. Sometimes they appear somewhat distraught but this presumably is to elicit compassion on the part of Maria. **They normally appear to her looking as they did in the prime of their life**, however children and teenagers always appear as they did right before their deaths. And while there are indeed some children in purgatory, their Purgatory is normally not very long or painful, since during their lifetimes they often could not have committed any grave sin since they did not attain much understanding or discernment, and are therefore not accountable to the extent that an adult is.*

The holy souls have also told her that there are many, many degrees in purgatory, and that the lower parts of purgatory are the most difficult and the most purifying, and this is where those with grave (severe) sins go--that is, grave sins that have not been forgiven in the sacrament of Confession. As each soul makes reparation for his/her sins that they have committed against God and their fellow man, they are slowly purified and therefore they slowly make progress to the higher levels of purgatory. The souls that appear to Maria are almost always souls that are residing in the higher levels of purgatory. Essentially, the more repentant and sorrowful one is for the sins committed against God and neighbor during one's lifetime, the quicker one progresses from the lower to the higher degrees of purgatory. According to Maria, the greatest "complaint" of the souls in Purgatory is how they are almost completely forgotten by their family and loved ones--that rightly complain that they receive no spiritual help from those they themselves helped so much during life! How few prayers are ever offered up for them--even at their funerals! Yet prayer is precisely what they need the most! All the beautiful memorials, celebrations, tattoos etc done and given in their honor, while they may be good intentioned, in reality do nothing for them and in no way help to relieve them of their suffering/purification."

The dead, therefore, know nothing of the earth (under the sun) because they are of the earth no longer, and all attachments to earth have gone along with their spiritual essence, the soul, into the infinite. There is no more reward or

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sharing in earthly pleasures and accomplishments. This, however, is what we are taught to believe. It is well-documented that the soul carries on with memories and knowledge after surviving physical death and can even return to the aura of earth for a time. The pain and suffering they may have known at the end of life is gone, yet, a different form of pain and suffering could await them in Purgatory, or even hell, if they do not achieve the Kingdom of God.

Interestingly, some souls from Purgatory who return to the living still seem to harbor past resentments, hatred, and anguish. Some continue to worry over surviving loved ones, and we can only surmise that they are where they are because they have not learned to forgive, love, or let go of past existence. As a result of these actions, their time spent in Purgatory will be, at most, lengthy and torturous, and they will require ongoing prayers and masses said for them.

Souls are in Purgatory to atone for sins, and the degree of punishment, or atonement, is dependent upon the degree of sin. Questions do arise, however, of the suffering the living endure while here on earth. If one suffers lengthy health issues and remains debilitated for a larger portion of their life, would they, then,

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be subject to punishment in Purgatory?

There have been Saints known to have endured incapacitating illnesses while on earth, having become “victim souls,” wherein they would take on terrible pains and sufferings so to spare themselves the agony of the purging fires of Purgatory.

Will suffering on earth alleviate suffering in Purgatory? The answer is YES. According to Father Paul O' Sullivan, in his article on the EWTN website, Purgatory *can* be avoided. There are several different ways this can be done, including by enduring suffering with dignity and grace during our lifetime. Father O' Sullivan lists seven means of avoiding Purgatory, I list in detail the third means first and the seventh which should be noted for future reference.

“The Third Means of avoiding Purgatory is very easy. It consists in making a virtue of necessity, by bearing patiently what we cannot avoid, and all the more since suffering, borne patiently, becomes easy and light. Suffering, if accepted with calmness and for God's sake, loses all its sting. If received badly, in the spirit of revolt and with repugnance, it is intensified a hundredfold, and becomes almost intolerable.

Everyone in this vale of tears has to face sorrows innumerable and infinite in variety. Crosses light and crosses heavy are the lot of us all. Strange as it may seem, these sorrows, which most of us would gladly dispense with, are in truth God's greatest

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graces. They are the little share He offers us of His Passion and which He asks us to bear for love of Him and as penance for our sins.

Borne in this spirit they will lessen considerably our time in Purgatory and very possibly completely remove it--with this difference, that Purgatory, even a Purgatory of 50 or 100 years, will in no wise increase our merits in Heaven; whereas, every pain and sorrow and disappointment in this life will lessen our suffering in Purgatory, and also bring us more happiness and glory in Heaven.

How sad it is that so many Christians, for want of thought, make their sufferings a thousand times worse than they are and lose all the immense merits that they could so easily gain.

RESOLUTION

Let us suffer with calmness and serenity for the love of God. We shall thus save ourselves from Purgatory.

The list of ways to avoid Purgatory, as told by Father Paul O' Sullivan, consists of these additional obligations which might take you directly to Heaven: frequent confession and Holy Communion, attending Mass, and receiving the sacraments, doing penance (charitable deeds), suffering with calmness and dignity, asking God for the Grace of Heaven, accepting death with dignity and reservation, and at the hour of death, the sacrament of Extreme Unction is said to take a soul directly into God's Kingdom. From Father Paul O' Sullivan:

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"The Seventh Means of avoiding Purgatory is Extreme Unction: God Himself has given us a Sacrament, the end of which is to take us directly to Heaven. This Sacrament

is Extreme Unction, which according to St. Thomas and St. Albert was instituted especially to obtain for us the grace of a holy and happy death and to prepare us for immediate entrance into Heaven.

Many Catholics do not understand this most consoling doctrine, and because they do not understand it, they prepare themselves insufficiently for the reception of Extreme Unction and so lose many of its great graces.

Every Sacrament properly received produces its effect. Baptism cleanses us from Original Sin and any other actual sins that may have been committed by adults before receiving the Sacrament.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders gives a priest all his tremendous powers. Matrimony makes man and woman husband and wife. In the same way Extreme Unction, if devoutly received, prepares the dying Christian for immediate entrance into Heaven, thus delivering him from Purgatory.

How foolish it is, therefore, to put off receiving this Sacrament until very late, when the dying person is too exhausted to receive it with full knowledge of what he is doing and with due fervour and devotion. The moment of death is the supreme moment in our lives. It is the moment which decides our fate for all Eternity."

We must pray for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. *It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.* - 2 Maccabees 12:43-46

The following Prayer of St. Gertrude the Great is a special devotion for this

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purpose and comes with special graces when it is prayed. This prayer is said to release 1,000 souls from Purgatory each time it is recited.

PRAYER OF ST. GERTRUDE

Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Most Precious Blood of Thy Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the masses said throughout the world today, for all the holy souls in purgatory*, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, those in my own home and within my family. Amen.