

Where did the notion of Purgatory come from?

2 Maccabees 12: ³⁸ Judas rallied his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the week was ending, they purified themselves according to custom and kept the Sabbath there, ³⁹ On the following day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his men went to gather up the bodies of the slain and bury them with their kinsmen in their ancestral tombs. ⁴⁰ But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had been slain. ⁴¹ They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden. ⁴² Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. ⁴³ He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; ⁴⁴ for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. ⁴⁵ But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. ⁴⁶ Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.

THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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III. The Final Purification, or 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 ^{954, 1472} of the damned. ⁶⁰⁶ 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: ⁶⁰⁷

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. ⁶⁰

1032 This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas 958 Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin."⁶⁰⁹ From the beginning the Church has ¹³⁷¹ honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, ¹⁴⁷⁹ they may attain the beatific vision of God.⁶¹⁰ 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.⁶¹¹

Purgatory is an often-misunderstood Catholic doctrine. It isn't considered a spiritual jail or hell with parole. And Catholicism doesn't teach that everyone goes to purgatory. On the contrary, the Church believes that many people are purified or purged, hence the term purgatory, in this life. For example, the Church believes that many innocent persons who suffer from disease, poverty, or persecution are living their purgatory now, and when they die, they probably go straight to heaven. The same goes for people who live an exceptionally good and holy life --no need for purgatory. But the Church believes that most everyone else, although not bad enough to go to hell, aren't good enough to skate into heaven with no need or some introspection and purification.

The real doctrine consists of the conviction that God's mercy and justice must be kept intact and upheld. God's divine mercy refers to the fact that he forgives any sin as long as the sinner is truly repentant and sorry. God's justice, however, is that good is rewarded and evil punished. Catholics believe that purgatory evens the score and fulfills justice while accommodating mercy. They believe that purgatory isn't a place but a spiritual state of the soul in which it's purified before entering heaven. Known as the Church Suffering, the souls in purgatory are definitely and absolutely going to heaven, just not yet.

Purgatory is more than the temporal punishment for sin. It's also the cleansing from the attachment to sin. Purgatory purifies the soul before the soul's grand entrance into heaven.

The word purgatory isn't in the Bible, but neither is the word Hell. However, praying for the dead is mentioned in the Second Book of Maccabees (found above). The belief is that if the dead were in Hell, no prayers could help them, and if they were in heaven, they wouldn't need any prayers. So a place must exist in between heaven and Hell were the souls who aren't completely prepared or ready to enter heaven go after death.

Catholics don't see purgatory as a place of pain and torment. Instead, it's considered a place of expectant joy, although suffering occurs from the temporary distance." Rev. John Trigilio and Rev. Kenneth Brighenti, *Catholicism for Dummies*, Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2003 (pp. 288-291)

Questions taken from A Brief Catechism for Adults by Fr. William J. Cogan, Tan Publishing.

How do you know that there is a Purgatory?

The constant teaching and practice of the Catholic Church, based on the Bible and Tradition, and even common sense, prove the existence of Purgatory.

How does common sense indicate the existence of Purgatory?

Only people with mortal sin go to Hell, and on the other hand, no one can enter Heaven with even the smallest sin. Therefore, there must be a place in the next world where lesser sins can be taken off the soul.

Who will go to Purgatory?

People who die with Sanctifying Grace in their souls, but-

1. who die with venial sins on their souls, or
2. who have not completed (satisfied for) the punishment still due to their already-forgiven sins.

What is meant by the "punishment still due to sin"?

This means that, even though God forgives your sins, He still requires that you pay for them, either in this life or the next. For example, a boy playing ball in his yard breaks the neighbor's window. He goes and tells the lady he is sorry, and she forgives him - but, she tells him he will still have to pay for the window.

How long will you have to suffer in Purgatory?

That depends on the number and seriousness of the sins to be atoned for.

Will Purgatory ever end?

Yes, at the Last Judgment. After that the soul will go to heaven forever.

Can you help the souls in Purgatory?

You can shorten their stay by having Masses said for them, by praying for them, and by doing good works for them.



St. Gertrude the Great was a holy mystic of the 14th century, who received many heavenly visions as a Benedictine nun. Among her numerous private revelations were short glimpses into purgatory. One such vision is described in the book *The Life and Revelations of Saint Gertrude* and highlights the power of prayer for the souls in purgatory.

On Wednesday, at the elevation of the Host, she besought our Lord for the souls of the faithful in purgatory, that He would free them from their pains by virtue of His admirable Ascension; and she beheld our Lord descending into purgatory with a golden rod in His Hand, which had as many hooks as there had been prayers for their souls; by these he appeared to draw them into a place of repose. She understood by this that whenever anyone prays generally from a motive of charity for the souls in purgatory, the greater part of those who during their lives have exercised themselves in works of charity, are released.

The Catholic Church teaches that the souls in purgatory are still in some mysterious way connected to the Church on earth and our prayers have an effect on their time spent in this final stage of purification. St. Gertrude is one of the most well-known saints who advocated for these holy souls in purgatory, and the Church often refers to her and her visions to help explain the concept of purgatory.

<https://aleteia.org/>

Prayer of St. Gertrude For the Holy Souls in Purgatory

Eternal Father, we 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.