

Thirty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time (English Mass)
Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)
November 5, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“The existence of a purgatory I have never denied. I still hold that it exists, as I have written and admitted many times though I have found no way of proving it incontrovertibly from Scripture or reason.” (Martin Luther, “The Thirty Seventh Article”, Luther’s Works, 32:95.)

Each November we join with millions of Catholics, spread throughout our world, to pray for our holy dead. We commonly refer to this practice as “Praying for the Souls in Purgatory.” Strangely enough, a certain notion has arisen in modern Catholicism which dissuades many of this noble practice. Rather, it holds an understanding that Purgatory was “invented” by church officials in the Middle Ages. Some would go so far as to state that the notion of a state of purgation, after death, is not found exclusively taught in Sacred Scripture. They would cite the famous passage of Saint Luke’s Gospel in which Our Lord Jesus declared to the thief: “This day you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43). It is in moments, such as these, where I find myself asking the question: “Where did we fail to teach our people?” Quite honestly, if Martin Luther, a Catholic monk and later founder of the Protestant Reformation, believed in a purgatory period after death, then why is it modern Catholics do not? Today, I will attempt to offer a thought, based on the writings of C.S. Lewis, of how we can think of a purgatory after death and begin to accept the Church’s teaching as truthful and deserving of our acceptance.

I begin with this statement: “Even if the Catholic Church had not taught of a state of purgation (cleaning) after death, our minds would move our hearts to formulate this belief. We would, furthermore, desire this cleaning no matter how long and painful it would last.”

Some may think my statement too bold, but it is, in my thoughts, not bold enough. I need Purgatory to exist. Now, using a thought from Lewis, please follow along with my example. You have been asked to serve as the best man or maid of honor at the wedding of a life-long friend. Let us say this person is your best friend who you have shared experiences with since your childhood. On the day of the wedding, you have the worst day of your entire adult life. You show up for the wedding (at the very last minute) with hair not combed, teeth not brushed, your clothes are stained from your baby’s revisiting their lunch, you’re wearing two different socks, and you are hot and sweaty from changing the flat tire your car had as you drove to the church. As you walk in, you notice that everyone else is in their formal attire. You begin apologizing for everything, but your friend says not to worry. You can still assume your place of honor just as you currently are. My question is this: “Would you begin just as you are currently OR would you politely excuse yourself from their company begging for a moment of time to clean yourself and dress in proper attire for the celebration?”

I assume many, not all, due to the respect and love they have for their friend, would ask for a moment of time to compose themselves and dress accordingly. Now, ask yourself, IF Heaven is the realization of the Church (as Bride) joining herself fully in union with her head and husband (Jesus), then would we not want to be properly disposed as we witness this supreme marriage? Remember, Jesus is not only our Lord and God, but He should be our best friend as

well. Therefore, I state again, we would want purgatory, out of our love for Jesus and the importance of this moment, we would be begging for purgatory.

My dear family, Sacred Scripture, in the Book of Revelation chapter 21, uses this imagery of the wedding feast to explain our inevitable end with God. It further reminds us that *nothing unclean will enter* into this heavenly wedding celebration. It is our desire to attend wearing our snow-white baptismal garment; carried unstained through our earthly life. Even if, upon our death, our God judged us worthy of attending this wedding feast, could we be so confident that we had lived lives worthy of, not once ever, allowing even the smallest stain of weakness to discolor our wedding garment? Would we not all want to look, in every way, our supreme best? Well, just something to consider when it comes to the cleaning after death which we call Purgatory.