

Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Latin)
November 3, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #45

*“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; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. 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. **Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.**” (2 Maccabees 12:43-46)*

In our reflection last weekend, we spoke concerning the offering of personal sacrifices to God the Father in union with the one true sacrifice offered by His Son upon the wood of the cross. Each year, in the month of November, we are provided an opportunity to offer our personal sacrifices, prayers and virtuous deeds for the Holy Souls in the state of purgation (Purgatory). To this day, I still meet Christians/Catholics who genuinely believe this state of purgation to not exist. They assume it to be a belief “invented” by ancient Catholics not finding clear reference in Sacred Scripture. Sadly, due to the use of many and varied translations of the Bible, not all Bibles contain the Books of the Maccabees which, quoted above, provide a clear reference to where this idea would find its roots. It is not my intention today to spend a great deal of time explaining our continued Catholic belief, its initial beginning from Judaism, in the state of Purgatory. However, it would be beneficial to, at minimum, offer a thought on this subject and how it relates to our topic of the Eucharist.

We must begin with the conclusion of humanity’s life and goal to understand Purgatory. From the first moment of our/human existence, it has been the desire of God that we/humanity reside in a familial relationship with Him. When Adam took his first breath or when some future person takes their last breath, God has desired all of His children to reside with Him in Heaven. We know, due to the sin of man’s first parents, sin and death entered into the world. A separation occurred between man and God which would exist until our Redemption by the salvific action of His Son. The gates of Heaven are now open allowing man to enter for all eternity. Currently, this residing in Heaven by those blessed souls we call the Saints, is not fully complete. It can only be complete once the Resurrection of the Dead occurs on the Last Day. When this moment does occur, those saints who enter, Body and Soul, into Heaven will reside for all eternity as God, Jesus’ Glorified Body, is now presently in Heaven.

Furthermore, we also believe and profess that sin and death are defeated, however, one item still exists which poses a question for every Christian. Let us examine this dilemma by first reaffirming those things we hold and believe. As a Christian, I believe the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus opened Heaven for all to enter. As a Christian, I believe God, who is Love, is fully or completely present in Heaven. As a Christian, I believe sin to be a privation of God’s Love. As a Christian, I believe NO SIN, no privation of Love, can exist in Heaven, in God. As a Christian, I believe for one to enter into Heaven, the person MUST be free from sin,

all sin. Therefore, as a Christian, I MUST either believe: (A) Every person who enters into Heaven after his/her death MUST be free from all vestiges of sin, even the most minute sin upon their death. Or, (B) God, in His Mercy, must provide an opportunity, after death, for a Christian to be free from sin before entering into Heaven. These are the only two options we can choose to believe concerning one's entry into Heaven.

As consoling as it may be for us to say or hear, if we are honest and if we use ourselves as the example, can any one of us say with full and firm knowledge, that we will die free from all sin or sinful inclinations? Rather, do we not find ourselves hoping to enter into Heaven by the smallest of margins. I hear many state their salvation to be assured by faith, but that does not solve our riddle of freedom from sin upon death.

Our Jewish ancestors believed the living could, in a meaningful way, assist those who had died through the offering of a sacrifice. We can read this in the Second Book of the Maccabees. Oddly enough, we profess this occurred when Jesus offered Himself as the Perfect Sacrifice upon the cross. His sacrificial death, we believe, truly affected those who had died prior to His coming upon the Earth. Now, if we continue holding Saint Paul's teaching of Colossians 1:24 which stated we can "*complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions of the sake of his body; that is, the church,*" then would it be safe to conclude our sacrifices, joined with His, can affect those who have died without being fully free from all sin? And, if this is our reasoned conclusion, we must ask ourselves why would we NOT OFFER our sacrifices for those we love who have died? I may conclude my deceased loved ones to be in Heaven, but what if I am wrong? What if they are still in need of being purified from any sin and I could assist them by my prayers, sacrifices or virtuous deeds? And, if our sacrifices offered with His in this Eucharist is, as the Catholic Church believes, the GREATEST PRAYER any one can offer to God, then why would I not show up each and every Sunday, myself free as best as I am able, from sin through Confession, to offer this ONE, TRUE, GREAT, SACRIFICIAL PRAYER to God the Father for those I love who have died? I will conclude with one last thought on this subject. If this teaching of both our Jewish and Catholic ancestors is wrong and our prayers for the dead were of no avail, then what harm was the result? Or, if they were right and our prayers, our sacrifices, joined with the sacrifice of Jesus were truly able to assist those we love who have died and we failed to offer them, then, I ask you honestly, why not offer?