

Poor Souls Novena

Indulgences

Raccolta #590. *The faithful, as often as they visit a church or public oratory, or even a semi-public oratory, in order to pray for the dead on the day on which the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is celebrated or on the Sunday immediately following, may gain: A plenary indulgence applicable only to the souls detained in purgatory, on condition of confession and Communion, and the recitation six times during each visit of Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.* Pope Michael has commuted the usual conditions, and the visit may be made to a private oratory, where the Pope has erected these. Further, Pope Michael permits those at some distance from such an oratory, to place themselves in the presence of God and recite the aforesaid prayers with devotion.

Raccolta #592: *The faithful who during the eight days from the Commemoration of All Souls inclusive, visit a cemetery in a spirit of piety and devotion, and pray, even mentally, for the dead may gain: A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, on each day of the Octave, applicable only to the dead.*

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Opening Prayers

Act of Faith: My God, I believe in Thee, that Thou art single in nature and threefold in person, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I believe that Thou dost reward the good and punish the wicked. I believe that the Son of God became man, died on the cross for us, and is present in the holy Sacrament of the Altar. I believe that man's soul is immortal, and that God's grace is necessary for salvation. This and all that the Catholic Church teaches, I firmly believe, because Thou, O God, Who art infinite truth and wisdom, has revealed it. In this faith I will live and die.

Act of Hope: I hope from Thee, O most gracious God, through the merits of Christ, my Redeemer, and by my cooperation, all things good, the forgiveness of my sins, Thy grace and eternal life, because Thou, O almighty, infinitely gracious and faithful God, hast promised this. In this hope may I live and die.

Act of Charity: I love Thee, O most amiable God, with my whole heart above all created things, not only because Thou hast loved me and heaped innumerable favors upon me, but especially because Thou art infinitely worthy of all love for Thy own sake, and because Thou art infinitely good. I love my neighbors, my friends, and my enemies as myself for love of Thee, and Thee in them. In this love I will live and die.

Act of Contrition: I grieve from the bottom of my heart, O my God, for all the sins of my whole life, because by them I have offended Thee, my greatest Benefactor, and strict Judge, and have deserved to be punished by Thee. I am sorry for all the sins of my whole life, above all because by them I have offended God, the highest and only perfect Good, whom I have lost by my sins, I hope for forgiveness through the merits of Jesus, my Saviour, and would rather die than again offend Him.

Now read the meditation and say the prayer for the day.

Closing Prayers

Psalm 129 De profundis

Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord; * Lord, hear my voice.

2 Let thine ears be attentive * to the voice of my supplication.

3 If thou, O Lord, shalt observe our iniquities , * O Lord, who shall endure it?

4 For with thee there is merciful forgiveness; * and by reason of Thy law, I have waited for Thee, O Lord.

5 My soul hath relied on His word: * my soul hath hoped in the Lord.

6 From the morning watch even until night, * let Israel hope in the Lord.

7 Because with the Lord there is mercy, * and with Him plentiful redemption.

8 And he shall redeem Israel * from all his iniquities.

V. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. R. And let perpetual light shine upon them.

V. From the gate of hell. R. Deliver their souls, O Lord.

V. May they rest in peace. R. Amen.

V. O Lord, hear my prayer. R. And let my cry come unto Thee.

Let us pray. O God, the Creator and Redeemer of all them that believe : grant unto the souls of thy servants and handmaidens the remission of all their sins ; that as they have ever desired thy merciful pardon, so by the supplications of their brethren they may receive the same. Who livest and reignest , world without end. R. Amen.

V. May they rest in peace. R. Amen.

First Day Existence of Purgatory

There is a place for the purification of Souls which, after death, are yet stained with venial sins, or have not yet entirely satisfied for their pardoned sins. The Holy Catholic Church teaches it. I believe it firmly. By the light of the flames of Purgatory, I understand better Thy holiness, Thy justice, Thy mercy, O my God! "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall rise up in his holy place? Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Ps. 23). "There shall not enter into Heaven anything defiled" (Apoc. 21). For Thou art Holy! Holy! Holy! O Lord, inspire my soul with the horror of sin! Grant me the grace to atone for my faults here below! Thou art just, O Lord, and Thy judgments are right. Who will dare to say: "Do not condemn me: tell me why Thou judgest me so?" (Job, 10, 2). "Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy

sight." (Ps. 50, 6). I have deserved eternal punishment, but Thy mercy will follow me—it will follow me into the depth of death, and I will be spared.

O Purgatory! where reigns Hope! There will I say with the Prophet: "Thou hast set me at liberty when I was in trouble!" (Ps. 4, 1). If there were no Purgatory, where would so many lazy, negligent, immortified souls go? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, Who comforteth us in all our tribulation." (II Cor. 1, 3-4).

Let us pray for our departed parents: O God, Who hast commanded us to honour our father and mother, have mercy upon them, deliver them from the pains which they have justly deserved, and grant that I may see them in the glory of Heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Second Day Pains of Purgatory

Let us go with our Guardian Angel to Purgatory, to that place where the Divine Justice purifies Souls before they are admitted into Heaven.

There we will meet again our parents and our friends. Had this devotion no other advantage than that of reminding us of our departed ones, we should be grateful to God for such a consolation.

O, my father! O, my mother! O, brothers! O, sisters! O, friends! I had forgotten you! What do ye suffer, beloved Souls? What shall I do to deliver you?

Our pains, they reply, are beyond description. When separated from our body, we saw the face of God, our Supreme Good, the Infinite Perfection. Then would we rush into His bosom, but we were driven back by His justice, we were banished! Oh, no! on earth below ye will never understand our pain, our grief, because we are separated from God! Your troubles, your sorrows, are the mere shadow of our affliction. But we suffer through our fault. If we would return to our former place on earth, we would be glad to accept the hardest mortification in exchange for Purgatory. "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least ye my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me!" (Job, 19, 21). Appease the Divine Justice with your good works, pay our debts, hasten the day when we shall enter into Heaven, and then we will return our gratitude forever.

Let us pray for our benefactors and friends: O God, Who dost bestow forgiveness and salvation, we address ourselves unto Thy clemency that, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints, the Souls of our departed brethren, relatives and benefactors, may be admitted into everlasting glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Third Day The Pain of Loss

During the long captivity of the Jews in Babylon, God's people, sitting on the shores of the Euphrates, moaned and cried in remembering Sion. So the Souls in Purgatory, plaintive and doleful, long for the joys of the heavenly mansion. They have had a glimpse of its glory and happiness, but because they were too much attached to earthly pleasures, they will be deprived, perhaps for a long time, of the celestial joys.

They remember all the negligence of their former life, which now obstructs their way to Heaven. What sorrows! what remorse! because they have preferred a moment of pleasure to the enjoyment of Heaven. Then the poor, desolate Souls accuse themselves, saying with the Prophet: "For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me." (Ps. 50, 5).

Since God has granted us the power of paying the debts of the Poor Souls with our works, let us appreciate this immense privilege. A noble heart should be delighted in relieving the poor, in consoling the afflicted, in bringing peace and happiness to those who suffer. Such is the privilege of those who assist the Souls suffering in Purgatory, because they deliver them from the hardest captivity and they open to them the gates of Heaven.

Moreover our charitable deeds for the Poor Souls will secure for us the gratitude of God Himself. "When," said our Lord to His holy servant Gertrude, "a Soul is liberated by your prayers, I accept it, as if I had been Myself liberated from captivity, and I will assuredly reward you according to the abundance of My mercy."

Let us pray for Bishops and Priests deceased: O God, Who hast deigned to raise to the pontifical or sacerdotal dignity Thy servants, N. N., grant us the grace of enjoying with them eternal felicity. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fourth Day The Pain of Sense

The pain of loss, the deprivation of the Vision of God, constitutes the supreme suffering in Purgatory. To this suffering of deprivation other sufferings of a positive nature are added. These are conditioned by the number and gravity of the sins which call for expiation and we have every reason to conceive of them alike terrible and prolonged. Though the Church has not pronounced any decision on this point, it is the opinion of its doctors that the Souls in Purgatory are tormented by fire which penetrates them and burns them as gold in the crucible (Prov. 17, 3), until it has reduced them to such a degree of purity, that they may be worthy to appear before God.

When a fire is raging, everybody is excited. The people rush to the spot and everyone tries to save those who are already surrounded by the terrible element. Why are we unmoved at the sight of so many Souls who are tormented in the fire of Purgatory and who claim our assistance? Let us not abandon them.

Let us pray for a deceased man: Hear, O Lord, the prayers which we address to Thy mercy, and grant us that the soul of Thy servant N. N., which is gone into another world, be received into the abode of light and happiness to enjoy the felicity of the Saints. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Fifth Day Duration of Purgatory

How long do the pains last in Purgatory? Nobody knows. God has allowed some Souls to appear to their friends and benefactors to announce their departure for Heaven, but it seldom happened, and we cannot draw any conclusion from such cases. The period of confinement in Purgatory is probably much longer than we are inclined to think. Oh! how much combustible matter—how many imperfections, venial sins and temporal punishments due to mortal and venial sins—do you think they took with them to be cancelled in the flames of Purgatory? Centuries may pass until Divine Justice is satisfied and the Poor Soul is so purified as to be admitted to the Vision of God. The Venerable Bede relates that it was revealed to Drithelm, a great servant of God, that the Souls of those who spend their whole lives in the state of mortal sin, and are converted only on their death bed, are doomed to suffer the pains of Purgatory until the day of the Last Judgment. Father Faber, commenting on this subject, says very justly: "We are not to leave off too soon praying for our parents, friends or relatives, imagining with a foolish and unenlightened esteem for the holiness of their lives, that they are freed from Purgatory much sooner than they really are!"

Let us consider the purity which is necessary to a soul, before being admitted into the presence of God! Let us remember the multitude of our venial sins, and see what light penance we have done for them. On the Day of Judgment the book of our deeds will be opened, and then we will be obliged to pay the last farthing. How guilty we are in abandoning so easily the Souls who need our assistance so much! The Saints are wiser. St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, was dead for twenty years, and she was still remembered by her son in the Holy Sacrifice. St. Ambrose promised solemnly and publicly to pray, during his entire life, for the soul of Theodosius the Great.

And supposing that we had delivered the Souls of our relatives and friends, have we emptied the prison of Purgatory? How many poor, abandoned Souls linger in such horrible pains, imploring the assistance of some charitable heart. St. Robert Bellarmine has affirmed that: "Some Souls would suffer in Purgatory till the Day of Judgment if they were not relieved by the prayer of the Church." Therefore, he authorizes the foundation of Masses to be said in perpetuity.

Let us pray for a deceased woman: We humbly request Thee, O Lord, to grant mercy to the soul of Thy servant, N. N., in order that, being delivered from the contagion of sin, she may enter into eternal salvation. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sixth Day Obligation of Assisting the Poor Souls

The Souls in Purgatory cannot help themselves; they are unable to shorten their captivity. This reason alone should urge us to come to their assistance.

After death there is no more place for mercy, the time for justice commences. The soul is no longer free to choose between good and evil, therefore she cannot obtain any merit and her sufferings are accounted only as a payment for her debts. Alas! to be condemned to such sufferings, to be afflicted perhaps during centuries! How bad it is for those Poor Souls.

Could we see an unfortunate man, lying on the road, wounded, bleeding and would we pass and abandon him? We hold the key of a prison, crowded with prisoners; they crave for liberty and shall we leave them in their pitiable situation! So we have received from the mercy of God the privilege of liberating the Souls detained in Purgatory. We may say that we are the Providence of the dead; we, and we alone, may open the gates of Heaven to the Souls who are longing for their deliverance. It is the teaching of the Church, that the prayer of the living can be applied to the Souls in Purgatory. As your prayers ascend to Heaven, graces come down as a refreshing shower, bringing to the Souls forgiveness, liberty, and glory. The supplications of Mary and Martha obtained the resurrection of Lazarus. Let us address our prayers to the heart of Jesus, and we will deliver from their pains our dear departed ones. Shall we not be guilty if we do not employ our credit in favour of the unfortunate prisoners in Purgatory?

Let us pray: We humbly beseech Thee, O Lord, to release the Souls of Thy servants, in order that they may obtain the glory of the resurrection and that they may be joined to the saints and elect in Heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Seventh Day Cruelty of Those Who Abandon the Poor Souls

Our Lord reproveth the cruelty of Dives, the rich man who refused even the crumbs of his table to poor Lazarus, while he himself was feasting sumptuously every day. Are they not imitating the wicked rich, who stand unmoved, seeing the sufferings of the Poor Souls? Those unfortunates who appeal to our compassion, are not strangers. Among them there are our parents, our benefactors and our friends. Not long ago, they were living among us in the same house. We bear their names, we inherited their lands; and we forgot them! We abandon them! They may say with Job: "My kinsmen have forsaken me, and they that knew me have forgotten me. They that dwell in my house, and my maid-servants, have counted me as a stranger, and I have been like an alien in their eyes." (Job 19, 15). To forget the dead is a crime. Solemn promises were made at the death-bed. A child has said to his father to his mother dying: I will not forget you! But where is the sign of this remembrance? Does it pray for them? Perhaps a vague, shadowy remembrance of the departed comes to its mind, but where is the profit to the Poor Souls? Useless and vain compassion! Empty love! Where are the works, alms, and holy Masses to assist, to relieve, to deliver the Poor Souls? Those who forget them will also be abandoned! "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." (St. Matt. 7, 22)

Let us pray: May our prayers be profitable, O Lord, to the Souls of Thy servants, that being absolved from their sins, they may have a share in the fruits of redemption. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eighth Day the Communion of Saints

How grand and consoling is the doctrine of the Communion of Saints! While we, in this world, are struggling for the celestial crown, and assist our brethren in Purgatory, we are protected by those who are triumphing in Heaven. We form, in reality, but one and the same family here below, in Purgatory, and in Heaven. If a member of our body is suffering, all other members come to its assistance. God loves the souls in Purgatory as His dear spouses. He would open to them the gates of Heaven, but there are barriers. Let us present to His justice our prayers, our good works, and the obstruction will be removed; God will be satisfied.

It is often an obligation of justice to pray for the Poor Souls, but it is always a duty imposed by charity and by the compassion which we owe to one another.

There are in Purgatory Souls abandoned even by their parents and their friends, and for whom no one cares. Forgotten is their life, no thinking of it anymore; forgotten is their name; forgotten is their grave, which is visited no more; forgotten is their Soul, which is lingering in the fire of Purgatory. How their pain is increased by such neglect; They may say with the Prophet: "I am clean forgotten as a dead man out of mind; I am become like a broken vessel." (Ps. 30, 15-16).

Let us pray for those who rest in the cemetery: O God, by whose mercy the Souls of the departed rest in peace, we beseech Thee to grant to Thy servants, and to all who rest in the Lord, the forgiveness of their sins, and life everlasting. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ninth Day Existence of Purgatory

This Novena is coming to a close. Do we understand the benefits and consolation to be derived from devotion to the Holy Souls? Do we need stronger motives to increase our zeal? Then let us consider that: Nothing is more glorious to God, nothing gives more honour to His Holy Name, nothing rejoices His Heart more, nothing is more pleasing to Him than charity for the Poor Souls.

To open Heaven to the Poor Souls is to increase the number of those who praise and glorify God, the number of hearts that love Him. "Such a work," says Bourdaloue, "is an apostolate more noble, more meritorious than the conversion of sinners, and even of heathens."

How we will please the Heart of Jesus, Who loves the Souls redeemed by His Precious Blood! He would willingly come into this world again and offer Himself for their deliverance; but all justice must be accomplished, and the debts of the Souls must be paid. Therefore, He has inspired His Church with the practice of praying for the dead every time the Holy Sacrifice is offered.

The Blessed Virgin is the Queen of Purgatory and will be highly gratified when we contribute to the relief of the Poor Souls.

St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death, will also present our requests to the Lord, who has been called his Son. He will repay us generously if we come to the rescue of the suffering Souls.

What joy among the Saints in Heaven when they will see another of the elect—a Soul coming out of Purgatory! Her Guardian Angel, the Holy Patron, will welcome and congratulate her! It will be a great joy in Heaven. The Saints know the benefactors of the Poor Souls, and they will, in return, protect them.

We have already said that the Saints in Purgatory will remember their benefactors. No, they cannot forget them! They will attentively provide for them in needs both temporal and spiritual. They will protect us and defend us in troubles, in dangers, in temptations. On our death-bed they will surround us. At the tribunal of God they will be our advocates; and, if we are cast into Purgatory, they will come to visit us, to console us, until the day of our entrance into a glorious eternity.

Let us pray for all the faithful departed: O God, Creator and Redeemer of all men, we beseech Thee to grant to the Souls of Thy servants the remission of their sins, so that by our prayers they may obtain the indulgence for which they long. Who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.