

Triumph of the Heart

PURIFICATION THROUGH GOD'S LOVE

Family of Mary

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In a great school of love

*Even death is illumined
and can be experienced as the
ultimate call to faith, the ultimate
“Go forth from your land” (Gen 12:1),
the ultimate “Come!” spoken by the Father,
to whom we abandon ourselves
in the confidence that he will keep us
steadfast even in our final passage.*

Pope Francis in his encyclical ‘Lumen Fidei’

Not in Heaven – Not in Hell

*Dear friends and benefactors, dear readers,
for a long time we have wanted to reflect on the theme of “Purgatory” with you.
It indeed concerns everyone since at some point we will all be confronted with
the so-called “Four Last Things”—Death, Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory.*

*Who in the moment of their passing
from this world will have managed to perfectly
fulfill his earthly vocation and is truly holy and
thus fit for heaven? But who in the moment of
death, in the moment of a personal encounter
with Jesus, will willingly reject our loving Lord?
“Yet we know from experience that neither
case is normal in human life,” said Emeritus
Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical ‘Spe Sal-
vi’. “For the great majority of people—we
may suppose—there remains in the depths
of their being an ultimate interior openness
to truth, to love, to God.... Yet in the pain
of this encounter, when the impurity and*

*sickness of our lives become evident to us,
there lies salvation. His gaze, the touch of his
heart heals us through an undeniably painful
transformation ‘as through fire’. But it is a
blessed pain, in which the holy power of his
love sears through us like a flame.”*

*Accordingly, Purgatory is not an “after-
life punishment camp,” but a gift of God’s mer-
cy. The so-called “poor souls” are so thankful
to attend a school of love, of conversion, just as
someone who is ill rejoices in view of a painful
operation if he is certain that he will be healed.*

In God's light they recognize the sorrowful truth—their great lack of love. Purgatory is their burning contrition for their sins and omissions, and their consuming desire for God, homesick for heaven, as such. They are poor in the truest sense of the word, because they can no longer do anything for themselves. They are completely dependent on the graces we obtain for them through which they are purified, cleansed, filled more and more with love and sanctified. This reality made St. Catherine of Siena, a Doctor of the Church, cry out, "*Oh how wonderful heaven must be that God carries out such a perfect purification!*"

Dear friends, the topic of Purgatory is such a broad spiritual topic that it is impossible to treat it in just a few pages. In an effort to do it justice, this issue is a little longer than usual. We also wanted the saints from various centuries to speak to us. In many different ways, they worked in the name of the poor souls so that they could open themselves more easily and promptly to God's mercy. Blessed Eugene Smet (1825 – 1871) even founded an order, the *Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls*, specifically for offering themselves for the suffering souls in Purgatory.

We hope the various articles about Purgatory will touch us and make us zealous helpers of the poor souls. The Redeemer desires our redemptive collaboration not only here on earth in the *Church Militant* but even beyond death he entrusts us with a special task—to make his redeeming grace fruitful in the *Church Suffering* for the poor souls. They are thankful for even the slightest act of love, each sacrifice and prayer, and they will prove themselves to be our best friends when we call on them.

We would also like to sincerely invite our non-Catholic readers, those who do not share our deposit of Faith about purification after death, to pray full of trust, "*Lord, give my love and prayer to those who need it most!*"

In the Old Testament, Judas Maccabeus sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem, to be offered for the sins of the dead. This shows that already in early Judaism they believed that one can help the deceased through prayer (2 Macc. 12:42-44). "*The equivalent practice,*" wrote Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, "*was readily adopted by Christians and is common to the Eastern and Western Church.*"

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks about the forgiveness of sins in the "*age to come*" (Mt. 12:32), which St. Augustine and Pope St. Gregory the Great refer to as Purgatory. St. Paul writes in the First Letter to the Corinthians that the work of each person will be tested and the person himself will be saved "*as through fire*". (1 Cor. 3:13-15).

In the tradition of the Church, the Acts of the Martyrs and inscriptions in the catacombs testify that in the time immediately following the apostles, in the first three centuries, the deceased were already remembered in a special way. "*Remember in your prayers we who have gone before you,*" is one of the numerous inscriptions, for example, in the Roman Calixtus Catacombs.

St. Augustine, a Doctor of the Church who lived in the fifth century, passed on to us the very touching request his mother Monica made as she was dying, "*Lay this body anywhere... Only this I ask: that you will remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you are.*" He also reports in his famous "Confessions", "*She took no thought to have her body sumptuously wrapped or embalmed with spices. Nor did she covet a handsome monument, or even care to be buried in her own country ... but only desired to have her name remembered at thy altar, where she knew that the holy sacrifice was dispensed by which that handwriting that was against us is blotted out.... And inspire, O*

my Lord my God, inspire thy servants ... that as many of them as shall read these confessions may also at thy altar remember Monica, thy handmaid."

In the course of the following centuries, monasteries and convents kept contact with one another so that they could pray for each other's deceased brothers and sisters.

Our love extends to the other side

Meritus Pope Benedict XVI continued in his encyclical 'Spe Salvi', "Love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death—this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today. ... No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse."

*T*hrough our unity and communion even after death, our love really can do something in the name of others, and God applies the grace for the poor souls as if they had done it themselves.

In fact, we can offer many daily occurrences to God for them—our contrition of love and even pain and suffering which we ourselves have caused.

This was the sense of the prayer which the angel in Fatima taught the shepherd children to pray: "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you. Forgive those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love you."

Jesus also explained to the spirited Sr. Consolata Betrone, a capuchin sister from Turin, Italy, that her so-called "act of love", a prayer of the heart, "Jesus, Mary, I love you; save souls!" includes everybody, the living and the dead. Jesus repeatedly encouraged her, and also us, "Waste no time, every act of love is a soul! Consider that every act of love can decide the eternal beatitude of a soul! Be careful not to miss a single 'Jesus, Mary, I love you; save souls!' because it expiates a thousand curses!"

Popes open sources of help

*I*n the twentieth century, millions died before, during and after the two World Wars—the majority completely unprepared for death—on the battlefield, in concentration camps or bombarded cities, and the popes defined new possibilities to help the poor souls.

The "Pope of the Eucharist", Pius X (1903 – 1914) published a decree shortly before the First World War broke out which said that a plenary indulgence may be obtained for the poor souls on the Feast of All Souls when believers receive the Sacraments and pray in a church for the intentions of the Holy Father.

*P*ope Benedict XV (1914 – 1922), during whose pontificate the Russian October Revolution, the First World War and the severe persecution of the Church in Mexico took place, also set in writing that on the Feast of All Souls every priest may celebrate the Holy Mass three times. The Holy Father earnestly hoped, "that every priest on earth ... should gladly and zealously take advantage of ... this unique privilege."

*H*is successor Pope Pius XI (1922 – 1939), whose pontificate was characterized by

his resistance to the totalitarian, anti-Christian movement of the Communists, urgently asked to bring relief to the deceased through a true “campaign of prayer” and especially the Holy Mass because we “observe all around us how the memorial of the dead for the majority of

people has gradually faded ... or is limited to exterior signs of love left at the grave which, although they are good, serve more to console those left behind as to help the suffering in Purgatory.”

Helped into Heaven

There have been saints and holy people documented throughout the ages who have shown themselves to be true friends and confidants of the poor souls. The souls suffering in Purgatory were allowed to appear to them and ask for help. After receiving help, they were also allowed to thank them and to prove themselves as helpful friends. St. John Marie Vianney said, “If one only knew what power these good souls have over the heart of God and what one can obtain through their intercession, they would not be so forgotten. If we want to obtain true repentance from God for our sins, then the best thing to do is to turn to the poor souls who have had remorse for their sins for years. ... You have to pray for them a lot so that they pray for us a lot! If we want to assure ourselves a place in heaven, then we have to have a great zeal for the poor souls! After the prayer for the conversion of sinners, prayer for the liberation of souls from Purgatory is the most pleasing to God. That is why at night I suffer for the souls in Purga-

tory and during the day for the conversion of sinners.”

Many poor souls also appeared to Therese of Konnersreuth (1898 – 1962) during the night and especially on November 2. She too was very original, calling her night-time visitors “begging cats”. Without fear and full of compassion, she helped them by offering up her pain and suffering. Therese thought so much of them that five days before her death on September 13, 1962, she asked her brother, as if it were her legacy, “Ferdl, don’t forget the deceased for me, the poor souls. Pray for them every day. You should not only pray, however, but also offer up your daily concerns. We do much too little for the deceased. They need our help, but they don’t want it for free. They are very thankful ... and help us in return in various ways. Don’t keep this request for yourself, but tell everybody with whom you come in contact!”

The Mother of Mercy leads them into Heaven

The German mystic Barbara Pfister (1867–1909) maintained such friendly company of the poor souls that she dealt with them in the same familiar fashion as she dealt with the living. She often visited Purgatory accompanied by her guardian angel, and she recounted, “Wherever I go there, I always hear the call, ‘Lord, have

mercy on me!’ And in the same way, Our Lady pleads for the poor souls during the Holy Mass. The most beautiful moments in Purgatory, if I may say it like that, are when Our Lady appears to pick up one or more purified souls and lead them into heaven.”

Once, Barbara experienced that the superior of a convent, who was widely considered holy and even had the stigmata, had to spend a longer time of purification in Purgatory because of an unfounded strictness towards one of her sisters. People were surprised, but Barbara explained, *“It is not long and it is not short. These expressions of time do not exist in Purgatory because eternity reigns there.”* At the end of a Holy Mass, Barbara was able to see how this soul finally went to heaven after Barbara had prayed and suffered for her. *“During the ‘Go forth the Mass is ended,’ the soul sang such a heavenly Hallelujah that I do not have the words to describe it. She lifted herself up, heaven opened and the Savior came to her with his radiant wounds. The superior’s stigmata radiated also, and with them she went as if into the Savior’s transfigured wounds.”* During the time before Christmas, the mystic was shown a vast field full of brush and thorns, symbolic for the condition of the

poor souls. Barbara began her tiring, seemingly unending *“Advent Project”*. With a cold sweat, exhaustion and other expiatory sufferings, she took on the misery of the souls in Purgatory until shortly before Christ’s birth when she could say with relief, *“Thanks be to God, now I’m on the way to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph. Everything, everything is behind me; the Advent project is finished.”* On Christmas, more souls were allowed to go to heaven than on any other day of the year.

Two other German mystics, Bl. Christina of Stommeln (1242 – 1312) and Princess Eugenie von der Leyen (1867 – 1929), experienced similar “Christmas graces” for the poor souls. Our Lady even confirmed this in Medjugorje during the apparition on January 10, 1983, *“It is not on All Souls Day, but at Christmas, that the greatest number of souls leave Purgatory.”*

St. Catherine of Genoa

*St. Catherine of Genoa (1447 – 1510)
is one of the great mystics of the Middle Ages
to whom God gave a new light about his love.*

*She has rightly been given the title “Theologian of Purgatory”
because what God permitted her to experience about the condition
of purification in Purgatory was in complete opposition
to the common understanding of Purgatory in her time.
It was thought that souls fall to a place inside the earth
to suffer punishment in terrible fires for the sins they had committed.*

Born on April 15, 1447, Catherine was the fifth child of the famous noble family Fieschi. Her father, the viceroy of Naples, Italy, died a half year before she was born. Nevertheless, her mother made it possible for her children to receive an exemplary upbringing and education in Genoa’s milieu of high nobility. Catherine

was described as an *“especially noble, most tender and beautiful”* girl, and this applied particularly to her soul. One look at the suffering Lord on the Cross inflamed in her, even as a child, such a great desire to console Jesus and to show him her love that she was always looking for the possibility to make a sacrifice.

When she was thirteen, she expressed the desire to enter the convent “Santa Maria delle Grazie” where her older sister Limbania had lived for

several years according to the Rule of St. Augustine. Although Catherine was very mature for her age, they did not accept her.

A very unhappy marriage

*H*er wish to enter a convent was ultimately shattered when sixteen-year-old Catherine Fieschi had to marry Giuliano Adorno in order to seal a friendly pact between the feuding families Fieschi and Adorno. The extravagant wedding took place on January 13, 1463, but Giuliano soon proved to be a violent, wicked husband who at the time of the wedding already had had a number of children out of wedlock.

This was the beginning of a woeful marriage for the well-educated and deeply faithful Catherine. While she lived alone and neglected in the Adorno family palace, Giuliano wasted not only his own but also her considerable fortune. Although Catherine prayed a lot for her husband and offered up all her sufferings for his conversion, his lifestyle did not change. On the contrary, he also succumbed to gambling and card

games and continued his passion for women.

*A*fter five years of marriage, 21-year-old Catherine had no hope for a brighter future. She fell into a depression and lost so much weight that her friends did not even recognize her. In her despair, she finally gave in to the pressure of her friends and relatives to distract herself and turn to the colorful activities of the high society. It did not take long before she was completely lost in the pleasures of the world. She wrote in her “spiritual dialog” about this time, “*I finally went so far as to be delighted by sin and even prided myself in it.*”

In spite of all that, Catherine did not find a moment of inner peace. She admitted later that in those five years of worldly life she did not have a singly truly joyful day.

No more of the world and no more sin!

*A*t the age of 26, Catherine, who still had no children, was impoverished and living in a ruined relationship with no perspective for the future, fell again into a deep depression. Although in the beginning she was able to cover up her moods, they increased to the point that she was no longer able to live her superficial, worldly life.

Extremely dejected, she went to a church consecrated to St. Benedict on the vigil of his feast, March 20, 1473. She asked the saint for the grace to lay in bed sick for three months so that she could distance herself from everything worldly. The next day, she went to visit her sister Limbania in the convent “Santa Maria delle

Grazie” who advised her to go to confession.

Unaware that the hour of conversion was upon her, the desperate Catherine went in search of a confessor. Before she could even start her confession, she was suddenly struck by a ray of love from God’s grace and she fell into ecstasy, unable to say a word. The priest in the confessional waited because he thought the penitent was preparing.

Time passed, and when somebody came looking for him for an urgent matter, he promised the silent Catherine that he would be right back and left. Upon returning to the confessional he found her still silent and in the same position. When the priest obliged her to speak, Catherine struggled to come out of her ecstasy, and she

was only able to ask that the confession be postponed. She saw her life since her fall and recognized with what love the Lord wanted to draw her to himself and what suffering her sinful life had caused him.

Seeing this evoked great contrition and, at the same time, ignited her love for God in a dimension she had never known before. In deep pain over having offended her so loveable God, she cried out, *“Oh my Love, no more of the world and no more sin!”* This became the motto for her life.

The fire of love interiorly transformed Catherine. Without having gone to confession,

she went home and cried bitterly. The grace of repentance remained present in her soul for a long time.

Shortly thereafter she had a vision. She saw the suffering Lord, the Cross on his shoulder and bleeding from all his wounds. Jesus looked at her lovingly and said, *“Do you see this blood? It is entirely out of love for you and shed in expiation for your sins.”*

St. Catherine was deeply shaken and went to make a general confession. The next day she received Holy Communion which from that moment forward became an imperative daily source of strength.

Years of penance and charity

For the next four years, Catherine lived a life of penance driven by her love for Jesus. She wanted to expiate her sins, and she was so repulsed by evil that she renounced herself in many things and worked on freeing herself from egoism until she could finally acclaim, *“It seems I have nothing left but love!”*

Filled with a glowing love for God, she felt called to pass it on to the others as well. So she joined the community of the “Ladies of Mercy” when she was 30. With these noble women, she dedicated herself to the poor and sick and did not shy away from bringing relief and consolation to the maggot infested sick in Genoa’s dirtiest alleys. Her efforts were soon noticed and conse-

quently she was asked to take charge of the well-known Pammatone hospital. After a few years of humble service she was made the manager of the hospital. Not only was she responsible for the entire staff, but also carried the whole financial burden of the institution which cared for several hundred patients.

Her husband Giuliano, who in the meantime had gambled himself into a complete financial ruin, slowly began to convert through her prayers and sacrifices. After many painful years, he finally became a faithful helper for his 50-year-old wife in caring for the sick, and he agreed to live a marriage free from intimate relations for the rest of their lives.

Like Mother Teresa in the 20th Century, St. Catherine sacrificed herself for decades for the poor, sick and dying. Once she complained to Jesus, “You ordered me to love my neighbor, and yet I can only love you alone and cannot let anything come close to you.” The Lord responded, “Who loves me also loves everything that I love. It is enough that you are constantly ready to do whatever is necessary for the good of your neighbor's body and soul. This love is free of any sensory dependency because you love your neighbor not in his person but rather in God.”

Catherine's charitable efforts did not hinder her from being a great woman of prayer. For more than 20 years, God gave her through many ecstasies light about the mysteries of his love.

The fire of love that burned in her was a martyrdom but at the same time gave her an incomparable zeal for doing good and igniting love for God in everyone she knew. This fire was so strong in her that sometimes people saw flames coming out of her body. If she placed her hands in water in this condition, then it started to boil. She felt this love consuming her heart so much that she was convinced that after her death they would find her heart reduced to ash.

Nine years before her death, she was seized with odd, very painful illnesses which the best doctors of the time could neither diagnose

nor treat. She cared untiringly for the sick until all her strength was consumed. When she was confined to bed for the last two years of her life, her final desire was to be united to God as deeply as possible. The great "Theologian of Purgatory" fell asleep on September 15, 1510 at the age of 63 with the words, *"Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit!"*

St. Catherine of Genoa was canonized by Pope Clemens XII in 1737. In the acts of her canonization it is recorded that, *"the teachings of our saint is free from error ... and completely seraphic."*

Her incorrupt body is still venerated today in a beautiful glass shrine in the Church of St. Catherine and the Most Holy Annunciation in Genoa.

The teaching about Purgatory

In her famous "Treatise on Purgatory", St. Catherine describes what a soul experiences when it passes from this life to the next and how it is purified in order to reach a full union with God. For many years, St. Catherine experienced in herself the purification process that the poor souls have to go through.

This mystical experience, which also brought her soul to a pure, selfless love of God, made her capable of understanding and describing the essence of Purgatory. Many theologians, like the Doctor of the Church St. Francis de Sales,

reached a completely new understanding of this place of purification through her writings.

When Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI spoke about St. Catherine of Genoa during his General Audience on January 12, 2011, he also highlighted the great contribution of mystics to theology: *"Dear friends, in their experience of union with God, saints attain such a profound knowledge of the divine mysteries ... that they are of help to theologians ... to attain a really deeper knowledge of the mysteries of faith, for example, of what Purgatory is."*

Purgatory – a place of God's merciful love

For St. Catherine, Purgatory is not an external fire but an inner fire, a fire of love for God.

"By means of this loving fire, she understood in her soul the state of the souls of the faithful

who are placed in Purgatory to purge them of all the rust and stains of sin of which they have not rid themselves in this life.”

*I*n her treatise, St. Catherine explains, “All the pains of Purgatory arise from original or actual sin. God created the soul pure, simple and clean of all stain of sin, with a certain beatific instinct towards Himself whence original sin, which the soul finds in itself, draws it away, and when actual is added to original sin the soul is drawn yet further away. The further it departs from its beatific

instinct, the more malignant it becomes because it corresponds less to God.”

St. Catherine saw that when a soul goes to heaven, it encounters the goodness and purity of God. The soul recognizes itself as in a mirror in this divine love; it sees its sins and faults, even the slightest imperfections. If the soul is in a state of grace, meaning that it is capable of accepting God’s mercy, it repents its sins and decides with its whole will never to sin again. Through this perfect contrition God can free the soul of the guilt of sin.

Ridding itself of sin

*N*ow the soul has only to be purified: “Sin’s rust is the hindrance, and the fire burns the rust away.” The time in Purgatory serves this purpose. St. Catherine describes with an image: “A thing which is covered cannot respond to the sun’s rays not because of any defect in the sun, which is shining all the time, but because the cover is an obstacle; if the cover be burnt away, this thing is open to the sun; more and more as the cover is consumed does it respond to the rays of the sun. It is in this way that rust, which is sin, covers souls, and in Purgatory is burnt away by fire; the more it is consumed, the more do the souls respond to God, the true sun.”

In their desire to be perfectly united with God, the soul freely and thankfully chooses the place

of purification to be fully cleansed. “When I look at God, I see no gate to Paradise, and yet because God is all mercy he who wills enters there. God stands before us with open arms to receive us into His glory. But well I see the divine essence to be of such purity, far greater than can be imagined, that the soul in which there is even the least note of imperfection would rather cast itself into a thousand Hells than find itself thus stained in the presence of the Divine Majesty. Therefore the soul, understanding that Purgatory has been ordained to take away those stains, casts itself therein, and seems to itself to have found great mercy in that it can rid itself there of the impediment which is the stain of sin.”

The condition of the souls in Purgatory

*S*t. Catherine recognizes how the souls in Purgatory intensely experience two conditions: “First, they see themselves suffering pain willingly, and as they consider their own

deserts and acknowledge how they have grieved God, it seems to them that He has shown them great mercy ... , making satisfaction with the precious blood of Jesus

Christ, ... the souls ... would not lighten it by one pang, knowing that they most fully deserve it.” On the other hand, the poor souls experience God’s love overflowing in them and

it gives them satisfaction, *“So that the souls in Purgatory enjoy the greatest happiness and endure the greatest pain; the one does not hinder the other.”*

Purified until pure gold

St. Catherine compared the purification of the soul through the fire of divine love to the process by which gold is purified: “the more you melt it, the better it becomes; you could melt it until you had destroyed in it every imperfection. Thus does fire work on material things. The soul cannot be destroyed in so far as it is in God, but in so far as it is in itself it can be destroyed; the more it is purified, the more is self destroyed within it, until at last it is pure in God.

“When gold has been purified up to twenty-four carats, it can no longer be consumed by any fire; not gold itself but only dross can be burnt away. ... When the soul has been purified it stays wholly in God, having nothing of self in it; its being is in God who has led this cleansed soul to Himself; it can suffer no more for nothing is left in it to be burnt away.”

All suffering and cleansing in Purgatory

comes out of love St. Catherine experienced. The soul *“sees by the divine light that God does not cease from drawing it, nor from leading it, lovingly and with much care and unfailing foresight, to its full perfection, doing this of His pure love. But the soul, being hindered by sin, cannot go whither God draws it; it cannot follow the uniting look with which He would draw it to Himself. Again the soul perceives the grievousness of being held back from seeing the divine light; the soul’s instinct too, being drawn by that uniting look, craves to be unhindered. It is the sight of these things which begets in the souls the pain they feel in Purgatory.*

“Unceasingly He draws it to Himself and breathes fire into it, never letting it go until He has led it to the state whence it came forth, that is to the pure cleanliness in which it was created.” Now the soul can enter into perfect union with God in heaven.

Be Full of Consolation and Hope

In their despair, people often sought help from the Cure of Ars when they thought that somebody who had tragically died might be lost forever. Through his inner association to the souls in Purgatory, John Marie Vianney also knew things no one else did and could therefore console so many of those who had been left behind.

Forgotten bouquets

The Baron Alix of Belvey, a confidant of the Cure of Ars, recounts the following:

“A pious woman prayed often for her non-practicing husband, especially since he was suffering from advanced heart disease which could have caused his death at any given time. Amidst her worries, she gladly decorated the statue of Our Lady in her home with flowers. Her husband, who could have cared less about the Faith, happily picked colorful bouquets for her even though he knew for what she intended to use them. Again and again he brought the most beautiful flowers for her statue of Mary until

one day he did, in fact, suddenly die—obstinate, rejecting the Faith, and without Last Rites.

“His inconsolable wife fell ill with worry and some were afraid she was going to lose her mind. In this miserable condition she went to Ars where John Marie Vianney, although he had never seen her before, said to her, ‘*Did you completely forget the bouquets for Our Lady?*’ The saint’s question left her dumbfounded, but at the same time it gave her consolation, and her inner peace returned. She understood and was certain from that moment forward that her husband’s little acts of love were the salvation of his soul.”

I hope that God forgives him!

Auxiliary Bishop Andreas Laun from Salzburg, Austria recounted in February 2012 another event in the life of the Patron of Priests John Marie Vianney to console a worried woman who had asked for his help. The bishop and moral theologian published his response on the web in

order to help other people as well:

“I recently received an e-mail with the following request, ‘*My dear brother took his life. He died immediately after jumping out of the window at his office. My brother’s death bothers me tremendously. I have a*

strong Faith, so I pray every day to Our Merciful God to forgive him for this act, but can somebody who commits suicide go directly to God without first being punished? Hopefully in death he found the rest and peace he was seeking. Here below, he had such a good heart; I just hope God will forgive him. Please, dear Bishop, can you help me to cope better with this situation? I need somebody to help me!

“The person wrote to me because I mentioned once in a television interview that my

brother died many years ago after jumping out of a fourth story window. I still know exactly where it happened in downtown Vienna and how I stood next to my dead brother until they removed his corpse. Having experienced it myself, I know how different and lasting the pain is when somebody loses a loved one through suicide as compared to losing someone through illness or old age. Since many people have *experienced* this, I wanted to publish an answer also in the internet. An experience of the Cure of Ars comes to mind.”

He is saved

“*O*ne day, Fr. Guillaumet, the long-time superior of the Immaculate Conception order, was on a train to Ars from Saint Dizier. In his compartment everybody was speaking about all the miracles that had taken place in the holy village. The name John Marie Vianney was on everybody’s lips. A lady in mourning sat next to the priest and listened in silence. Only after the pilgrims had disembarked did she turn to Fr. Guillaumet and ask, ‘*Reverend, please allow me to follow you to Ars. It does not matter where I go; I am traveling only to distract myself.*’

“The priest offered to show the mourning lady around the pilgrimage site and introduce her to the saint. As the eleven o’clock catechism was finishing, Fr. Guillaumet and the woman with the black veil went to the square between the church and the rectory. They did not have to wait there long before the saint, still wearing his vestments, appeared. He approached slowly with his head down. Suddenly he stopped before the woman who had knelt down with the rest of the crowd. He bent over and whispered in her ear, ‘*He is saved.*’ Surprised to the utmost, she stood up. Again the Cure of Ars stated, ‘*He is saved.*’ A gesture of disbelief was the only answer of the stranger. A third time he said with emphasis on each word and expounded, ‘*I tell you—he is saved. He is in Purgatory and we have to pray for him. Between the bridge*

railing and the water he had just enough time to make an act of contrition. Our Lady gave him this gift. Remember the month of Mary. In May, you always had a statue of Mary in your room, and your husband tolerated it. Although he did not believe, he sometimes united himself with your prayer. This gave him contrition and a last act of mercy.’

“*A*lthough Fr. Guillaumet standing next to the widow heard everything clearly, he did not understand what he meant. It was not until the next day that he made the connection. The lady in mourning spent the time after her moving encounter with John Marie Vianney in prayer. Her manner had changed and she radiated peace. She sought out Fr. Guillaumet before leaving, thanked him for his help and said, ‘*I am leaving Ars and returning home healed. The doctors sent me on a trip for my health. The truth is, however, that a terrible pain of despair was gnawing at me whenever I thought about the tragic death of my husband. He was not a believer, and I had lived in such hope of leading him to God. Now the time was up. He freely took his life and I believed that he was lost for all eternity. I thought we would never see each other again. And now you also heard how the Cure of Ars said, “He is saved.” So I will see him again in heaven. Reverend, I am healed!*’”

Our Merciful God's judgments are completely different

*T*he auxiliary bishop from Salzburg wrote further:

“Somebody may object, ‘Sure, the Cure of Ars can speak like that, but you Bishop Laun are not the Cure of Ars. And besides what about the many, many other cases?’ It is true, but I can say many, many consoling things: God tries to save a person until the last second of their life, even if it is the last second. One thing is certain—no matter what the circumstances of the suicide are, God will forgive those who accept his forgiveness in the last second and he will call, ‘Soon you will be with me in paradise!’

“Naturally there are also marginal cases where people like the unrepentant thief on the cross do not want to have anything to do with God.

“*W*ith a man like Hitler, who shot himself, we might suspect such a refusal; but not even with him can we be sure. Only God alone can judge! We have no insight into his judgments, and John Marie Vianney’s enlightenment was an exception. One thing is certain, however, God’s judgment is just, and it is always coupled with his mercy!

“With my brother, however, I felt exactly the same way as the author of the letter I quoted. I thought about all the good things, the especially good acts of my brother and said to myself, ‘God has not forgotten all this, and none of us “earn” heaven. It is always a gift for a sinful person ... which we “only” have to accept. Jesus knew about my brother’s

hardship and it is my conviction that with his act he did not want to scream a “no” of refusal at his Redeemer. That is certainly not the way he intended it! Is my brother in Purgatory? It could be, probably yes, but in its essence Purgatory is much more a grace than a penalty, a grace which only helps him to become entirely pure—helping those saved from suicide just like almost every other person when they die.’

“But did we not learn that every murder, and suicide falls into this category, is a mortal sin? Yes, and what you learned is correct. But we have also learned: God alone knows the individual cases; and what seems to us to be a mortal sin on the surface can be in reality, and therefore also in God’s judgment, something completely different. Not every mortal sin fulfills all the conditions that have to be present for an act of mortal sin to really be a mortal sin!

“*N*ot with one word, but with all these words: I cannot tell the author of the letter how God will judge her brother, but I can give her a lot of hope ... for her brother and for my brother and for many other brothers and sisters who have taken or will take their lives. Whether from a bridge or somewhere else, it is true here too that God’s ways are not our ways but his ways are always ways of salvation, and until the end he urges each person to go his way in order to reach him—to be with him in paradise—if not today, then soon!”

The Mother of the Poor Souls

Maria Simma

Maria Simma (1915 – 2004) from Sonntag, Austria, does not have the title “Theologian of Purgatory”, but she too had the vocation to know things from the poor souls about the afterlife and to transmit them to the living.

“I only went to school until eighth grade,” the humble woman explained, “but through my relationship with the poor souls I have learned a lot. ... I cannot really say why the poor souls come to me. There are many people who are more pious than I am ... but God’s ways cannot be fathomed. ... It would be much easier for me to keep everything to myself than to make it public and have to defend it, because there is so much that people misunderstand and despise, even priests.”

Nevertheless, Maria Simma remained faithful to her demanding service to the poor souls for more than 60 years.

Seek the proper path

Maria Simma grew up in a family with many children; they were so poor that early on her siblings went to other people for work or to serve as nannies. Maria, who was very disposed to the Faith, felt pushed to make a special sacrifice to God. “Therefore I prayed as a schoolgirl on the long way to pick up the milk, ‘Dear God, you can do anything. Grant when I pass one of the barns that a piece of paper is laying inside with what I should do written on it.’ Again and again I went into the barns looking for that piece of paper, but it was always in vain. I slowly grew impatient and said to our dear God, ‘You know, it won’t be my fault if I don’t find the way you want me to go.’ When I finished school at age 17, I thought, ‘I’ll go to the convent, maybe that’s what God wants.’”

However, because of her delicate health she was turned down three times.

After looking for eight years, the now 25-year-old thought, “‘I’ve missed my chance. I was not able to find the path that the Lord chose for me.’ This troubled my soul for a long time. But since in my childhood I had a great love for the poor souls and my mother greatly valued them, I just did what she always urged us to do: ‘If you have a big intention, go to the poor souls, they are the most grateful helpers.’”

Maria promised Our Lady a life of chastity and prayer—also in the name of the poor souls—through the consecration to Mary according to St. Louis de Montfort. She lived very

modestly, was in charge of cleaning the church in Sonntag, volunteered to help prepare the children for Confession and First Holy Communion

and took care of her father until his death. From 1947 on, she lived alone and ran a little garden nursery to supplement her income.

*H*er whole life, Maria Simma remained a simple, down-to-earth Catholic who had God-given perseverance, a cardinal virtue which she surely needed in her interactions with the poor souls. A six page psychological report resulting from an examination ordered by the theology professor Dr. Ewald Bohm from Innsbruck, confirmed that Maria was not subject to hysteria and was psychologically sound.

One night in the early 1970's, her parents' house, constructed primarily of wood, suddenly filled with smoke. Although no flames were seen, the inside of the house was so charred that it was rendered uninhabitable.

Maria moved to another house, and in 1989 the same thing happened. The mother of the poor souls entrusted to her neighbor Justina Nigsch, that she was sure that in both cases it did not have anything to do with a natural fire. She was at peace, however, and said, "God allowed it and expected this sacrifice from me."

The first poor soul appears

*T*he year was 1940 when 25-year-old Maria Simma saw in her bedroom one night a strange man slowly walking back and forth. "I was not easily scared," she explained later, "I would have more readily jumped in somebody's face than have been afraid. So I asked him with a gruff, 'How did you get in here? Did you lose something?'"

"He acted like he had not heard anything, and continued pacing to and fro. 'Who are you?' I asked, and when he did not answer me a second time, I jumped out of bed to grab him. However, all I grabbed was a handful of air. I went back to bed and again saw him walking about. 'I am awake, why can't I grab him?'" I thought, climbed out of bed again and slowly walked over to him. As I wanted to seize him, I again came up with nothing. He was simply gone. Now it had become a little bit creepy. I lay back down on my bed; it was about 4 a.m. Although he did not return, I could not sleep any more. The next day,

after Holy Mass, I went to my spiritual director and told him everything.

"*If something like this happens again,*" he instructed me, *'do not ask, who are you; rather, what do you want from me?'*

"The next night, the same man came as the night before, and I asked him, *'What do you want from me?'*

"Finally he answered, *'Have three Holy Masses offered for me, and then I will be redeemed!'*

"Then I knew, 'It must be a poor soul.' And my confessor confirmed it."

*I*t was the beginning of Maria Simma's apostolate for the poor souls. For the next 13 years, individual souls came to her, most of them in November, the month of the poor souls; and she helped with the permission of her spiritual director. She never turned a soul away.

Will you suffer for me?

On the Feast of All Saints 1953, the poor souls asked the help of the mystic, who lived a rather secluded life, to help them through suffering; Maria agreed. The poor souls presented themselves both day and night to their spiritual benefactor in very different ways, most of the time coming in work clothes. Some were suddenly as visible as the living; others came less clear, like in a haze or even in frightening forms with expressions of despair.

The more they were helped through Maria's expiation, the more friendly they became. Some of them were able to make their requests in their native dialect and others, from foreign countries and cultures, begged in broken German with strange accents.

Maria Simma accepted all her suffering, most

of which was foretold and then also suddenly stopped. For example, for a luke-warm soul, one that had become tepid in the Faith, she had the feeling of spending hours in a paralyzing cold, as if having to lie between two blocks of ice. "Often I had to suffer for only five minutes," Maria said, and yet the pain seemed to last for five days.

"Only in heaven will we know what our patient suffering united with the suffering of Christ achieved. The most effective way to offer up our suffering is to offer everything to Our Lady that she may grant graces to whomever she wants because she knows best who needs it most."

Fulfilling tasks in the name of the poor souls

One year later, in the summer of 1954, Maria began to help in a new way. "The poor souls came every night. Among other things, they told me who they are, their names, and when and where they died. They gave me the task of contacting one of their relatives. Through this, everything started to become public, and I found this very unpleasant." Understandably, she had to overcome herself to write mostly to complete strangers who had been left behind and to instruct them, for example, to donate to the missions, something which the poor soul had never done in its lifetime; to pay off a hidden debt; to settle injustices; to return other people's property; to clear up cases of slander or defamation or have a Holy Mass cele-

brated for the poor soul and to participate in their stead, receiving Holy Communion with love.

In a record from November 21, 1954, Maria wrote, "I often considered how I could send a poor soul to somebody else, and asked why they don't simply contact their relatives directly. It would be much easier than having me do it. Then a soul came and gave me a sharp reprimand, 'Don't sin against God's task! He gives his graces to whomever he wants. You will never have the power to send a poor soul to another person.'" Fr. Matt wrote in his report to the bishop, "When she received a message for someone, I usually sent them to the parish offices for them to examine and pass on." Many responses affirm Maria Simma's in-

formation regarding cases about which she knew nothing.

Many times, the souls asked for prayer, and Maria was also permitted to seek the help of others. She would ask priests, for example, to

pray for the souls of deceased priests. More and more people wanted information about the state of their departed loved ones; and the postman recalled that Ms. Simma often received as many as fifty letters a day. In the summertime, up to eight buses of visitors a day arrived from Austria, Germany, Belgium, France and Switzerland.

Alfons Matt, the exemplary, very matter-of-fact pastor of Sonntag, believed in Maria's charisma and supported her from the beginning. He accompanied her for decades as her spiritual director, and he wrote in his official detailed report to Auxiliary Bishop Frany Tschann in Feldkirch in 1954, "What Maria Simma experienced in her interactions with the poor souls and learned from them ... what she saw to our consolation in the hours of greatest suffering ... transmits a valuable insight into the afterlife ... and is in complete accordance with the teachings of the faith about Purgatory."

Eavesdroppers at the bedroom window

Naturally, there were enough people who did not believe her, who thought that it was all a fraud. Among them were some neighborhood boys who, in their curiosity, raised a ladder on the side of Maria's wooden house two nights in a row and climbed up to the open window of her bedroom.

They were eyewitnesses in 1954 to how the one they were spying on spoke with the poor souls and took notes, how she moaned and cried and looked for a handkerchief. Although the young men did not see or hear the poor souls, they never made fun of Maria again.

When one of the poor souls told her what had happened, she asked why the youth were not able to perceive the poor souls. It was explained to her, "*The boys are still alive.*"

"*But I am also still alive and I hear you,*" she objected.

"*You belong to us ... the path to you is bright,*" the poor soul helped her understand. "*You have given yourself in a special way to the Mother of Mercy through your consecration, and she gave you to us. Therefore the path for many souls to you is so bright. You do well to readily accept us with love and compassion.*"

Like handing out gold nuggets

Maria Simma said, "It is cruel not to use the treasures of the Church for poor souls. Or would it not be cruel when you are standing before a mountain of gold nuggets and have the possibility to take as many as you want in order to give them to somebody in need who cannot take them on their own, and you do not

make the effort to reach your hand out to give?"

For this reason, during her numerous conferences Maria never grew tired of drawing attention to how easily one can bring a poor soul relief and help them into heaven: especial-

ly through Holy Mass which is irreplaceable; through coredemptive suffering of any kind, be it physical or spiritual, which one offers up for them out of love; through the Rosary, the Sta-

tions of the Cross or a pilgrimage; through each attentive act of love, like lighting a blessed candle at a grave or sprinkling holy water; through a donation to the missions.

Experiences with the poor souls

Now we will let Maria Simma recount a few impressive experiences with poor souls which she had over the course of the years. “Once a farmer came to me and complained, *‘Right now, I am building a barn. Every time the wall reaches a certain height, it collapses. We have examined everything and there is nothing wrong. There must be something supernatural going on. What should we do?’*

“I asked him, *‘Do you know somebody who has died who might have something against you or considered you an enemy?’*

“He answered, *‘Yes, there is somebody. I immediately thought that it can only be him, that he would not leave me in peace, even from the other side.’*

“*‘He only wants,’* I said, *‘that you forgive him and that’s all!’*

“*‘What, I should forgive the one who caused me such harm during his life so that he can just fly up to heaven? No, no, he should do penance for what he’s done!’*

“I had to quiet him down, *‘He won’t just fly to heaven. He has to do penance, but it is easier for him to accept. He won’t leave you in peace until you forgive him with all your heart.’* Since he did not agree, I asked him, *‘What do you pray in the Our Father—forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. You are practically saying to God—you may not forgive me because also I do not forgive my neighbor.’*

“*‘You’re right, now it’s clear to me,’* he had to admit. So finally he struggled his way through, *‘In God’s name I want to forgive so that the Good God may also forgive me!’*”

Maria experienced how plainly a good deed or a virtue which is practiced can help in the name of the deceased. In 1954 she was taking an afternoon walk to the neighboring village. In the middle of the forest, she met an old lady. “I thought, *‘She must be over a hundred years old.’*

“When I greeted her cordially, she said, *‘Why are you greeting me? Nobody greets me anymore!’*

“I consoled her, *‘You deserve to be greeted like anybody else.’*

“She began to complain, *‘Nobody thinks that way about me. Nobody gives me something to eat and I have to sleep on the street.’*

“*‘That’s impossible,’* I thought, *‘she’s lost her mind.’* I tried to explain to her that what she said cannot be true.

“*‘But it really is,’* she retorted.

“I thought, *‘Even if she might be difficult, she won’t be around for long because she is already so old.’* And so I invited her to eat and sleep at my place.

“*‘Yes please, but I cannot pay anything.’*

“*‘That doesn’t matter; you just have to accept the house as it is. I’m not set up for guests, but it is better than sleeping on the street.’*

“She thanked me with relief, *‘May God repay you. Now I am redeemed,’* and disappeared.

“Until that moment, I did not realize that I was dealing with a poor soul. Obviously, she had turned somebody down in her earthly life whom she was obliged to help.” Thereby Maria was able to rectify with an act of love precisely the

lack of love for which this soul had to be purified in Purgatory.

The following account shows how a seemingly insignificant act of love can be decisive for all eternity. “*What are you doing*

with that cleaning bucket?” I asked a lady I met whom I did not recognize as a poor soul.

“*It’s my key to heaven,*” she radiantly responded. “*During my lifetime, I didn’t pray much, and I didn’t go very often to church, but one time I cleaned a poor old lady’s house for free before Christmas. This saved me.*”

I have to begin a new life

“*I* will never forget an encounter with a priest whose right hand was black,” Maria said. “I asked about the reason, and the priest admitted to me, *‘I should have blessed more. Tell this to every priest you meet. They should bless more because they can spread blessings and turn away much evil.’*”

Once, she had to write to a family telling them to return a piece of property they did not have the right to keep. She immediately received a visitor. “I heard somebody swearing out in the hallway. So I opened the door to see what was going on. There was a man outside who contemptuously blurted out, *‘Where is the poor soul fantasizer?’*

“*‘Come on in,’* I told him, *‘but there is no poor soul fantasizer here.’*

“He immediately came to the point, *‘Did Mr. E. appear to you?’*

“My angry visitor was in fact one of the members of the family to whom Mr. E. wanted me to write and tell them to give back the unjustly held property.

“When I affirmed his question, he started to rage that this was impossible, that it was extortion and fraud. *‘What unjustly held property should we return?’* he wanted to know concretely.

“*‘I don’t know, I was just asked to find your family and tell them to give back the property they were unjustly holding. You must know which one it is,’* I replied. He knew exactly which one we were talking about!

“*I* could tell from how he was talking that he did not have much to do with the Christian faith because he cursed the pope, the Church and the Faith. Nevertheless, after I calmly explained everything to him, he settled down and said, *‘If that’s the case, then I have to begin a new life. I didn’t trust priests any more, but I have to believe again in God because there is no way you could have ever known that on our estate there is an unjustly held piece of property. Not even all the members of our family knew that.’*”

Love covers a multitude of sins

Lack of love in any form, but especially a failure to reconcile after years can make for a hard time for the poor souls in Purgatory. Maria Simma shuddered to experience this reality as one time a soul going through a great purification appeared to her in the form of an animal.

Here it must be said that, of course, a sinner does not turn into an animal when it dies. Only the wicked, animal-like condition that the soul is in is symbolically reflected in a repulsive, alarming appearance.

“*A* man wrote to me that his wife had died one year ago. Since then, there had been a knocking every night in his room. He wanted to know if I could come sometime and find out what was going on. I drove over, but I told the man that his wife might not be allowed to appear to me yet. We had to leave it up to Divine Providence.

“I slept in the aforementioned room. Around 11:30 p.m. it started to rumble. Right away I asked, *‘What do you want, what shall I do for you?’* I had never seen anything like it before. *‘This woman is not allowed to come yet,’* I thought.

Then after about five minutes, I heard a terrible trampling. A big animal approached. I had never seen anything like this before. It was a hippopotamus. I immediately sprinkled holy water and asked, *‘How can I help you?’* Again there was no answer. It was very eerie.

“Then the devil came in the form of a giant, gruesome snake which wrapped itself around the animal in order to strangle it. Suddenly everything disappeared. I was very concerned and questioned, *‘The woman cannot be lost though?’* A short time later a poor soul came in the form of a person, as they usually come to me.

“She consoled me and gave me clarity, *‘Do not be afraid, the woman is not lost, but she is in the worst Purgatory that exists.’* The poor soul then explained why: for decades this woman was hostile to another woman and their hatred for one another was her fault from the beginning. Worse yet, her enemy often wanted

to make peace with her, but she refused. Even when she was gravely ill, she gruffly dismissed the other lady’s offer for reconciliation, and, in the end, she died without making amends.

“Here we see that even though there are often disputes in our lives, we should try to make things good as soon as we can. We should forgive as quickly as possible. Love stands over everything else. Love covers a multitude of sins; that can’t be said enough.”

*H*ere is another poor soul experience of Maria Simma. “It was 1954 after a great avalanche. A 20-year-old man who lived in an avalanche-safe house heard cries for help. He jumped up immediately to go outside, but his mother held him back however. *‘The others should also help for once. When avalanches are breaking free like this, it is much too dangerous outside.’*

“Her son would not let himself be held back. He raced toward the calls for help, was caught in an avalanche himself and died. After just two nights, he came to me and asked me to have three Holy Masses said for him.

His relatives were surprised that he would be redeemed so quickly because he had not been especially zealous as far as religion goes. The man entrusted to me however, *‘God was so gracious to me because I died in the service of charity. I never would have had such a lucky hour of death for the rest of my life.’* Yes, we will not know until we reach eternity how good the dear Lord is to us.”

Translated from: Maria Simma,
Meine Erlebnisse mit Armen Seelen

*T*hrough decades of close bonds with the poor souls, Maria Simma realized,
“No soul in Purgatory would want to return to this dark world in which we live

*Because the soul knows that it is saved and that eternal life lies ahead.
It desires the purification process like gold is purified from slag in fire.*

Maria Simma

Pilgrim chapel to the Mother of Mercy for the poor souls

One poor soul was allowed to tell Maria Simma that Our Lady wished to have a chapel built in Sonntag which was big enough to have Holy Mass celebrated inside. In addition, she told her exactly where the future chapel should be—namely where a Marian memorial had once stood but which was destroyed by an avalanche. After the avalanche, the owner promised to donate the property on which the memorial stood for the construction of a chapel.

Maria was completely unaware of this promise unlike the local pastor Fr. Matt. *“I informed my spiritual director,”* she reported, *“and he immediately took it seriously because he knew that a memorial had earlier stood on this spot, something I personally had no idea about. Only the older people could remember it.”*

And so the chapel was built at the desired location. When it was finished, Our Lady had another poor soul tell Maria that a picture should

be painted for the chapel depicting her as the Mother of Mercy for the Poor Souls.

“I asked Our Lady for a good painter,” Maria Simma said. *“A short time later a polish Jesuit named Fr. Stanislaus Skudrzyk came to me. When I expressed my wish, he explained to me that he knew a good painter in Cracow, Professor Adolf Hyla, who would be more than capable. The polish Jesuit ... took everything into his own hands, even the financing of the image whose transport from Cracow through London to Sonntag was trouble-free.”*

In the month of Mary, May 1959, the chapel was dedicated. It has stood as a chapel and memorial for the poor souls, open to pilgrims, ever since.

Several years ago, the Marian image from Professor Hyla over the front entrance of the chapel and the Belgian statue “Mother of the Poor” were restored. To this day, the Rosary is prayed in the chapel on the 13th of each month, on the day of the Fatima apparitions.

A Shrine for the Poor Souls

The magnificent basilica “Our Lady of Montligeon” was built in a remote area of Normandy, France through the initiative of a French country pastor, Fr. Paul Joseph Buguet (1843 – 1918), and today it is known worldwide as a center for the souls in Purgatory.

It is the heart of an international work of expiation in which, for more than 120 years, countless people pray united with Mary for the souls in Purgatory, especially for the most forgotten among them.

*I*t all started in August 1878, when Fr. Paul Buguet was transferred to the poorest and most forgotten village in the Diocese of Seez, La Chapelle-Montligeon. Along with renewing the faith in the parish, Fr. Buguet had two great concerns—remedying the poverty of his parishioners by providing jobs and secondly, the fate of the deceased. Two years before his transfer, he felt pushed to found an organization to help the poor souls. When his brother August was killed a short time later by a falling church bell, the question about the fate of the poor souls plagued him. He finally understood, *“I have to work for the liberation of these souls. ... To mitigate the suffering in Purgatory, we should do expiation here on earth. Everything can be offered up for this cause from the time we wake up in the morning until we lay down in the evening—every difficulty and worry.”* In his zeal for souls, the priest never tired preaching about praying for the deceased. Above all, he was faithful to an intuition, *“For a long time I have celebrated Holy Mass on Mondays for the poorest soul in Purgatory and I have noticed that this soul has worked many graces for me.”*

In 1884, he had a surprising inspiration about how he could combine his two great concerns: *“To have prayers said for the forgotten souls; to free them from their torture through the Sacrifice of the Mass, which comprises the greatest expiation and, on the other hand, to find ways and means with their help that the workers can make a living. In my spirit this was like a ‘business exchange’ ... like a mutual liberation.”*

An extraordinary sign confirmed Fr. Buguet’s inspiration. In May 1884, an unknown woman, about fifty years old with simple clothing, asked him to celebrate a Holy Mass for her intentions. Eight days later when he celebrated the Holy Mass as agreed, he saw her again in the back of the church. This time she was wearing a light blue gown, her head covered with a long white veil to her waist. *“Who is that?”* he asked himself. The woman prayed for a long time in front of Mary’s altar and then thanked the priest *“for his charity with which he celebrates Holy Mass every Monday for the poorest souls.”* How unusual, since until now he had not told anybody about the Monday Mass intention!

*T*o this day, people who are suffering over their lost loved ones are drawn to "Our Lady of Montligeon". The whole work of expiation and prayer for the poor souls is entrusted to her care, and through her motherly presence the New Gothic shrine for the poor souls has become a place of consolation and hope and the center of a lively, worldwide family of prayer.

Priests, sisters and trained laity also do an important service of love in the basilica by assisting the pilgrims in their sorrow, listening to them and consoling them. Fr. Buguet placed great emphasis on this in his time.

A Marian work of expiation

*D*eeply impressed by this visit, Fr. Buguet wrote simple statutes and asked his bishop permission to found the intended work with the

goal *“under the patronage of ‘Our Lady of Liberation’ to have Holy Masses celebrated for the deceased.”* One sou, the equivalent of

a nickel today, was enough for the annual membership dues, since it was intended to be a work of the poor for the poor.

“That’s fine,” Bishop Tregaro said to Fr. Buguet when he signed the statutes in October 1884, *“even if it doesn’t succeed, you’ll still have the merit; and if God wills, nothing will hold back your work.”*

*W*ith the blessing of the Church, Fr. Buguet started the work in the Marian chapel of the old village church St. Pierre and placed a statue of “Our Lady of Liberation” there.

When shortly thereafter all his parishioners had enrolled in the expiation work, he started going from town to town across the diocese to inflame the faithful with love and compassion for the forgotten souls in Purgatory. Even in the neighboring dioceses he promoted membership to the association for one sou.

In order to print the registration forms, images and information pamphlets about the work, a small printing press was soon needed, and so the care for the poor souls even brought jobs for his parishioners. After only three years, the work was known throughout France and beyond. Fr. Buguet understood though, that it needed not

only an office and regulated pastoral care for pilgrims but above all a larger church. With great trust in Divine Providence and the intercession of the poor souls, he drew up plans for a large shrine to be built on the outskirts of the village in the middle of the fields. In order to raise the necessary funds for the project, he traveled throughout Europe and even to North America.

*B*y 1895—there were already three million members enrolled—Pope Leo XIII raised the work worldwide to the supreme association of all organizations which care for the souls in Purgatory. Around the world, thousands of Holy Masses were now be celebrated for the poor souls every year in the intention of the work of expiation of Montligeon. In 1916, the association could finally move into the new church “Our Lady of Liberation”. Yet the next year Fr. Buguet fell seriously ill and died in June 1918. His body was buried in the crypt of the basilica La Chapelle-Montligeon.

The popes have shown great interest in this unusual work of a French country pastor. Giuseppe Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, was a member of the confraternity as Apostolic Visitor from Bulgaria from 1929 onward.

Like a vast, invisible parish

*T*he work of expiation of Montligeon considers itself today to be a worldwide community of prayer and solidarity for the deceased, a “fraternity without borders” which unites not only continents but also the living and the dead. *“Anybody”* according to Fr. Buguet, *“can belong to our association”*.

Those who became members during their lifetime expressed their readiness to work for the fraternity’s living and dead through prayer, a life of faith and also personal engagement in the Church. At the same time, they also had a share in the torrent of grace from the worldwide

prayer and Holy Mass which is celebrated daily on every continent for the association’s living and deceased. The real strength of the work which Fr. Buguet founded lies in the belief of the effectiveness of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The astonishing work of expiation was formed at a time when the Church had really slackened in her concern for the poor souls. Fr. Buguet died in 1918, one year after Our Lady taught in Fatima to pray *“for those in most need of mercy”* and a few months before the end of the First World War in which fifteen million people died, mostly unprepared.

Membership continues, of course, after death.
Therefore the register from Montligeon today contains around
ten million names of the living and the dead.
If you are interested in joining this work of expiation, more information is available:
Sanctuaire Notre-Dame de Montligeon, 61400 La Chapelle-Montligeon
Tel. 011 33 233851700 Fax 011 33 233851715 Internet: www.montligeon.org

*“I am with you always,
the Lord tells us,
and my hand supports you.
Wherever you may fall,
you will fall into my hands
and I will be there even to the gates of death.
Where no one can accompany you any longer
and where you can take nothing with you,
there I will wait for you
to transform for you the darkness into light.”*

Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI
during the Angelus on All Souls Day 2008