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## LENTEN PASTORAL OF THE BISHOP OF CHRISTCHURCH.

(Concluded.)

LET us now hasten to consider the nature of the sufferings borne by the souls in Purgatory. "The Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit, has taught in her councils from Holy Writ and the ancient traditions of the Fathers, and this ecumenical synod has now recently declared, that "there is a Purgatory, and that the souls detained therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar" (Bess Trident xxv Decret de Purgat). Furthermore, the Church pronounces a formal condemnation against those who shall maintain that, "After receiving the grace of justification, the guilt and eternal punishment are remitted to every repentant sinner in such a way that no temporal pain remains to be endured, either in this or in the world to come, in Purgatory, before an entrance into heaven can be obtained." Thus it is of faith that there is a middle state which we call Purgatory, where some souls are punished for a time till they are sufficiently purified to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But where Purgatory is, what is the nature of the punishment? the Church has not defined. Yet it is the commonly-received opinion of theologians, grounded on the authority of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, that there is a fire in Purgatory, and that this is no other than a real, material fire. The Catechism of the Council of Trent, a work of the highest authority, says, speaking of the abode of the dead: "Among them is also the 'fire' of Purgatory, in which the souls of the just are cleansed by a temporary punishment in order to be admitted into their eternal country, 'into which nothing defiled entereth.'" The truth of this doctrine, the holy Council declares, demands "diligent and frequent exposition." The Angelic Doctor St Thomas asserts that the same fire torments the damned in hell and the just in Purgatory, adding, that the least pain in Purgatory exceeds the greatest that can be suffered in this life. The Ven Bede declares that the fire of Purgatory is more intolerable than can be felt or conceived here below. Being disengaged from matter, the faculties of the holy souls in Purgatory are far more perfect than when they depended on the exercise of corporeal organs. Hence there is an especial, an undefinable horror to the disembodied soul in being subject to this material agony. So keenly do they feel the intense pain they undergo, that were it not for the assured hope of one day entering upon the joys of heaven, their place of torments would be a very hell itself. Their souls are a continual prey to the most excruciating torments amid devouring flames ever fed and fanned by the avenging breath of the Almighty. The active executioners of God's awful justice are no other than the angels of heaven. Some theologians have gone so far as to maintain that the very demons of hell are suffered to harass and ail of those chosen ones of Christ amid the flames of Purgatory. And we, dearly beloved brethren and children in Christ, remain insensible to all this, instead of hastening to relieve their fearful distress! We seem to breathe the very atmosphere of Purgatory, and yet remain unmoved at the sight of our fellow-brethren who suffer therein. We deem it a happy thing if they escape the fire of hell, whatever pains they may endure in Purgatory. But have we ever seriously dwelt on their intensity? Have we ever tried to realise what it is to be a victim of the wrath of an Omnipotent God? Come in spirit, for a moment, to one of the many infected hospitals at Home, where, with its hundreds of inmates, the most loathsome discussion of humanity present themselves under every hue and form. Traverse its pestiferous wards, approach that lowly couch, gaze for an instant on that emaciated form, those bleeding wounds, the sunken cheeks, those glassy eyes, the look of agony of that wretched life slowly ebbing away amid racking pains, as often the fruit of sin as of sickness and sorrow. The sight is too much for you. You cannot bear it and live. Know, then, that the sickness and sorrows and sufferings of thousands and millions of such ones as naught compared with the sufferings of the poor souls in Purgatory.

A few years ago there reached us from across the Atlantic a cry of distress which resounded throughout the length and breadth of the

whole world. It told us how one of the most dreaded of earthly scourges had swept over and laid in ruins one of the fairest cities of the New World. How, in a few moments, more than thirty thousand human beings had been hurled from the heights of plenty into the depths of wretchedness and woe. Many of you can doubtless recall to mind the appalling scenes of that awful calamity. Try and bring back the appalling sight. Thousands, some perhaps of your own race, and relations, perishing amid billows of flames from which there was no escape. Children suddenly bereft of their parents, fathers unable to save their families, mothers, like Rachel of old, bewailing the loss of their offspring and refusing to be comforted because they are not. Among the touching incidents recorded at the time, there is one still fresh in our memory, one the bare thought whereof moves us to-day as deeply as when it was first related. A father had rescued his wife, in spite of herself. Looking around she missed her two little children whom she had sought to save. The poor man understanding that look rushed amid the flames. He succeeded in bringing the dear little ones to the top of the burning building, when suddenly a crash was heard. The roof gave way, hurling the father and his children into the flames beneath. The poor heart-broken mother burst like a maniac from the grasp of a friendly crowd, and dashed headlong to share the fate of her own flesh and blood. For miles and miles doleful sounds were borne from the living masses whom the fiery waves now hemmed in on all sides. Harrowing groans and sighs, the utterances of anguish were everywhere heard, mingling with the voice of despair, appealing in vain for pity from hundreds buried alive beneath the ruins of their once happy homes. To add to the horror of the scene demons in human form, hastening like vultures to the prey, went about ransacking the smouldering ruins. Nor did they shrink from stripping the dying and the dead. Nay more, not a few ruthlessly slew many who might have been saved from the wreck! This brief recital fills you with horror, yet, dearest in Christ, the frightful sufferings brought about by this awful calamity, frightful though they be, are but a drop in the ocean, compared with the sufferings of Purgatory. Ponder over all the tortures the countless martyrs of Christ have endured by rack, and fire, and sword. Unite these to the sufferings arising from bodily diseases, what a terrifying idea shall we have of their violence? And yet it was revealed to St Magdalene of Pazzi that the sufferings of the holy souls in Purgatory are greater, far greater, than all those of the most violent diseases, united with all that could be inflicted by every possible instrument of torture! Besides the martyrs and all who suffer on earth suffer in body only, and we know well that the sufferings of the soul are far more keenly felt than those of the body. For the body, separated from the soul, is incapable of pain, whereas the soul, disunited from the body, suffers with the utmost intensity. Again, for the martyrs of Christ, the very love which burned within them served as a sweet balsam so powerful to assuage the violence of their tortures that often, under the scourge, upon the gibbet and the rack, he who suffered and he who spoke to the bystanders seemed not to be the same. Thus, as cruelty is the measure of the martyrs' torments, so nothing but love is the measure of the agony of the poor souls. Hence it follows that as much as their burning love surpasses the cruelty of the tyrants, so much the more their sorrows and sufferings exceed the torments of the martyrs. If this fail to give you an idea of the dreadful sufferings of the souls in Purgatory, think of all that the Son of God underwent for us. Follow Him scene by scene through the bitter drama of His Passion. Recall the bloody sweat and agony in the garden of Gethsemani. Count the weary steps and tears, the wondrous shedding of His precious blood. Behold the sharp thorns wherewith the diabolical hatred of His enemies hath encircled His sacred brow. See the marks of those cruel stripes which, to the number of five thousand, lacerated His adorable body. Contemplate the man of sorrows bending beneath the weight of His cross, goaded on by brutal blows, amid the blasphemous yells and curses of an infuriated rabble. In fine, look upon the Saviour of the world as He lies bleeding upon the wood of the cross. An unbearable three wrings from His parched lips words of agony as He expires on that infamous tree, O God! to what a fearful state hath occurred sin reduced

**MR. J. S. ATKINSON**  
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