

PURGATORY

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but are still imperfectly purified, are assured of their eternal salvation. Yet after death they undergo a final purification so as to be made ready to enter the fullness of the holiness and joy of heaven.

The Church names this final purification of the elect *Purgatory*. It is not a place of punishment for the damned, but the merciful and purifying action of God in those who are already saved. The Church's doctrine on Purgatory was articulated in a more formal way at the Councils of Florence and Trent, while drawing deeply from Scripture and the long tradition of prayer for the dead.

Within this tradition, the Church speaks of a "cleansing fire," understood not as material fire, but as the purifying love of God that heals and completes the soul. In this light, even lesser faults are purified before the final judgment. As Scripture suggests, there is a forgiveness that extends beyond this present life: "whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (cf. Mt 12:32). From this, the Church has understood that while some sins are forgiven in this life, there is also a final purification in the life to come.

Purgatory, then, is not a second chance at salvation, but the final purification of those already destined for heaven, so that nothing remains in them that is not fully conformed to the love of God.