

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

EXTRACT FROM HOMILY XIX, THIRD PART

Church Association Tract 126

Now to entreat of that question, whether we ought to pray for them that are departed out of this world, or no. Wherein, if we will cleave only unto the word of God, then must we needs grant, that we have no commandment so to do. For the Scripture doth acknowledge but two places after this life: the one proper to the elect and blessed of God, the other to the reprobate and damned souls; as may be well gathered by the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke xvi. 19-26); which place St. Augustine expounding saith in this wise, "That which Abraham speaketh unto the rich man in Luke's gospel, namely, that the just cannot go into those places where the wicked are tormented; what other things doth it signify, but only this, that the just, by reason of God's judgment, which may not be revoked, can shew no deed of mercy in helping them which after this life are cast into prison, until they pay the uttermost farthing?" These words, as they confound the opinion of helping the dead by prayer, so they do clean confute and take away the vain error of purgatory, which is grounded upon this saying of the gospel, *Thou shalt not depart hence, until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing* [Matt. v. 26]. Now doth St. Augustine say, that those men which are cast into prison after this life, on that condition may in no wise be holpen, though we would help them never so much, And why? Because the sentence is unchangeable, and cannot be revoked again. Therefore let us not deceive ourselves, thinking that we may either help other, or other may help by their good and charitable prayers in time to come. For, as the Preacher saith, *When the tree falleth, whether it be toward the south or toward the north, in what place soever the tree falleth, there it lieth* (Eccles. xi. 3); meaning thereby, that every mortal man dieth either in the state of salvation or damnation, according as the words of the evangelist John do also plainly import, saying, *He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life; but he that believeth not on the Son shall never see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him* (John iii. 36). Where is then the third place, which they call purgatory? Or where shall our prayers help and profit the dead? St. Augustine doth only acknowledge "two places" after this life, heaven and hell. As for the third place, he doth plainly deny that there is any such to be found in all Scripture. Chrysostom likewise is of this mind, that "unless we wash away our sins in this present world, we shall find no comfort afterward." And St. Cyprian saith, that, after death, "repentance and sorrow of pain shall be without fruit; weeping also shall be in vain, and prayer be to no purpose." Therefore he counselleth all men to make provision for themselves while they may, because, "when they are once departed out of this life, there is no place for repentance, nor yet for satisfaction."

Let these and such other places be sufficient to take away the gross error of purgatory out of our heads; neither let us dream any more, that the souls of the dead are anything at all holpen by our prayers; but as the Scripture teacheth us, let us think that the soul of man passing out of the body, goeth straightways either to heaven, or else to hell, whereof the one needeth no prayer, and the other is without redemption. The only purgatory, wherein we must trust to be saved is the death and blood of Christ; which we apprehend with a true and stedfast faith it purgeth and cleanseth us from all our sins, even as well as if he "were now hanging upon the cross. *The blood of Christ, saith St. John, hath cleansed us from all sin* (1 John i. 7). *The blood of Christ, saith St. Paul, hath purged our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God* (Heb. ix. 14). Also in another place he saith, *We be sanctified and made holy by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, done once for all. Yea, he addeth more, saying, With the one oblation of his blessed body and precious blood, he hath made perfect for ever and ever all them that are sanctified* (Heb. x. 10. 14). This then is that purgatory, wherein all Christian men put their whole trust and confidence, nothing doubting, if they truly repent them of their sins and die in perfect faith, that then they shall forthwith pass from death to life. If this kind of purgation will not serve them, let them never hope to be

released by other men's prayers, though they should continue therein until the world's end. He that cannot be saved by faith in Christ's blood, how shall he look to be delivered by man's intercessions? Hath God more respect to man on earth, than he has to Christ in heaven? *If any man sin, saith St. John, we have an Advocate with the Father even Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins* (1 John ii. 1,2). But we must take heed that we call upon this Advocate while we have space given us in this life, lest when we are once dead, there be no hope of salvation left unto us. For as every man sleepeth with his own cause, so every man shall rise again with his own cause. And look in what state he dieth, in the same state he shall be also judged, whether it be to salvation or damnation. Let us not therefore dream either of purgatory, or of prayer for the souls of them that be dead: but let us urgently and diligently pray for them which are expressly commanded in Holy Scripture, namely, for kings and rulers, for ministers of God's holy word and sacraments, for the saints of this world, otherwise called the faithful: to be short, for all men living, be they never so great enemies to God and his people, as Jews, Turks, pagans, heretics, infidels, &c. Then shall we truly fulfil the commandment of God in that behalf, and plainly declare ourselves to be *the true children of our heavenly Father, who suffereth the sun to shine upon the good and the bad, and the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust* [Matt. v. 45]. For which, and all other benefits most abundantly bestowed upon mankind from the beginning, let us give Him hearty thanks, as we are most bound, and praise his name for ever and ever. *Amen.*