

November 11, 2018: Pope Benedict's Encyclical on Hope (*Spe Salvi*), Part 2

Dear Parishioners,

Here is the rest of Pope Benedict's treatment of Purgatory from his Encyclical on Hope (*Spe Salvi*) which we started last week:

47. *Some recent theologians are of the opinion that the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour. The encounter with him is the decisive act of judgement. Before his gaze all falsehood melts away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, **allowing us to become truly ourselves**. All that we build during our lives can prove to be mere straw, pure bluster, and it collapses. 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, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God. In this way **the inter-relation between justice and grace** also becomes clear: the way we live our lives is not immaterial, but our defilement does not stain us for ever if we have at least continued to reach out towards Christ, towards truth and towards love. Indeed, it has already been burned away through Christ's Passion. At the moment of judgement we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy. It is clear that we cannot calculate the "duration" of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world. The transforming "moment" of this encounter **eludes earthly time-reckoning**—it is the heart's time, it is the time of "passage" to communion with God in the Body of Christ^[39]. The judgement of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace. If it were merely grace, making all earthly things cease to matter, God would still owe us an answer to the question about justice—the crucial question that we ask of history and of God. If it were merely justice, in the end it could bring only fear to us all. The incarnation of God in Christ has **so closely linked the two together—judgement and grace**—that justice is firmly established: we all work out our salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil2:12). Nevertheless **grace allows us all to hope**, and to go trustfully to meet the Judge whom we know as our "advocate", or parakletos (cf. 1 Jn 2:1).*

48. *A further point must be mentioned here, because it is important for the practice of Christian hope. Early Jewish thought includes the idea that one can help the deceased in their intermediate state **through prayer** (see for example 2 Macc 12:38-45; first century BC). The equivalent practice was readily adopted by Christians and is common to the Eastern and Western Church. The East does not recognize the purifying and expiatory suffering of souls in the afterlife, but it does acknowledge various levels of beatitude and of suffering in the intermediate state. The souls of the departed can, however, receive "solace and refreshment" through the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving. The belief that 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. Who would not feel the need to convey to*

their departed loved ones a sign of kindness, a gesture of gratitude or even a request for pardon? Now a further question arises: if “Purgatory” is simply purification through fire in the encounter with the Lord, Judge and Saviour, how can a third person intervene, even if he or she is particularly close to the other? When we ask such a question, we should recall that **no man is an island**, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. **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. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, not even after death. In the interconnectedness of Being, my gratitude to the other—my prayer for him—can play a small part in his purification. And for that there is no need to convert earthly time into God’s time: in the communion of souls **simple terrestrial time is superseded.** It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain. In this way we further clarify an important element of the Christian concept of hope. **Our hope is always essentially also hope for others;** only thus is it truly hope for me too^[40]. As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well.