

**“It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead,
that they may be loosed from sins.”**

2 Macc 12:46

In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel, Our Lord exhorts His disciples to ‘Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt 5:48). Most of us might think that this is a tall order: be perfect? Certainly, most of us struggle to avoid sin and the thought that we might one day attain to perfection sometimes seems a ludicrous notion. We simply know we never shall, at least not in this lifetime. Because of this, many Christians have ignored, or dismissed outright, this injunction from Our Lord, or claimed that it is an ideal to be aimed at but which we should not seriously think we can ever attain. But our Holy Father Pope Leo, earlier in the summer in the context of a talk he gave about married life, reminded us that perfection is not simply an ideal to strive for but the model, the measure of true, self-giving love.¹

And that’s the whole point of our holy religion. We – you and I – were made in the image and after the likeness of our God. Now, as Baptized disciples of Christ, we are called to model ourselves on the image and likeness of our Saviour. Just as Christ became like us in all things but sin (Phil 2:7) so we must now grow to become like Him in all things, including His sinlessness. When we get to heaven, we do not know what we shall be like except we *do* know that ‘we shall be like to Him because we shall see Him as He is’ (1 Jn 3:2). By the time we reach heaven we shall have been re-moulded as a piece of clay in the

¹ Pope Leo XIV, Sunday allocution in St. Peter’s Square on Sunday, June 1, 2025, given to a crowd gathered for the Jubilee of Families, Children, Grandparents, and the Elderly.

hands of the potter (Is 64:8), re-shaped, and conformed wholly to the likeness of Christ our model.

But there are two chief ways in which you and I are not like Christ. First – and most obviously – you and I are not gods whereas He is God. Nevertheless, through the transforming power of grace we can, and do, come to participate in the divine nature, as St Peter tells us in one of his Letters in the New Testament (2 Peter 1:4). The second way in which we are not like Christ is in our sinfulness. Unlike Him, we – all of us – are sinners in need of forgiveness. By contrast, and being God, our Redeemer is wholly without sin, of course.

Our task in this life is to become like to Christ by knowing Him, serving Him, and loving Him: we must strive for a life of virtue by doing good and avoiding evil (Ps 33:15) so that we may be raised from our sinfulness until we can share in His divine nature.

Along the way, we know that Christ has far more patience than we have, and that He forgives more readily than we do. Again and again, in the Sacrament of Confession He forgives and raises us up once more, and carries us one more step along that path to perfection. We have until the day we die to become perfect.

But here's the thing. Even when we die, God affords us a great mercy by giving us the tremendous gift of Purgatory. You see, all sins must be punished as part of our perfecting process, even those that have already been absolved in Confession. If we have suffered in this life more than we have sinned – and if we have offered those sufferings up to God as penances – then our perfecting process will be complete at the moment of death and we shall rise straight to heaven. However, if we have sinned more than we have suffered – if our perfecting process is not yet completed by the time we come to die – then that process must continue after we have died. That is what Purgatory is: the place – or, more probably, a

state of existence – where any outstanding punishment for sins is demanded of us so that we can be made ready for that last step into eternal life and beatitude.

Having passed the threshold of death, the Holy Souls can no longer help themselves. So, the task of those of us here below is always to pray for those who are suffering in Purgatory, first out of love for them, second because the Church commands us to, and third because one day we will want others to pray for us! So please, I beg you, be generous in your attempts to gain indulgences for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, and pray for them always.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon.

May they rest in peace. Amen.