

DEAR DEACON BULLETIN INSERT

❖ Dear Deacon Jim,

What are your thoughts on Purgatory? When a funeral Mass is held, we are made to think the deceased is going to Heaven at the time of death. Nothing is said about Purgatory, yet we are told to pray for our loved ones, How long do we keep praying for them?

❖ Response

By His death and glorious Resurrection, Jesus Christ opened for us eternal salvation in heaven. The scriptures do not teach us that all who die, **unless in perfect communion** with God during their earthly life, go straight to heaven. There is first a “pit stop” on this journey. The Bible tells us that if we know Christ, we are safely in God's hands and that nothing “*in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:39). However, those who are in complete denial of God, refusing to ask forgiveness for their sins, will be condemned to hell and eternal separation from God.

Through the mercy and love of God, that “pit stop” is a process called Purgatory. It is for those who die in the state of friendship with God but are not fully purified and perfected yet are assured of their eternal salvation. The soul undergoes a period of purification from the sins committed on earth and the perfection of love and holiness in preparation to enter God's heavenly kingdom that is ultimately paradise.

Regarding your next question, the Church accepts that most of the deceased souls will make that first “pit stop” through Purgatory on their way to eternal paradise in Heaven. Hence, theologically, since the deceased following purification will eventually go to Heaven, there would be no need to say anything about Purgatory during the funeral Mass.

There is no set timeframe on how long we should keep praying for our dead loved ones. Remember that praying for the dead is one of the spiritual acts of mercy. It would do a lot of good and help many souls if we pray daily for all those who are suffering, not only in this world but also in purgatory and to the Communion of Saints.

We should **pray unceasingly** as St. Paul instructed the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Deacon Jim