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# THE POWER OF LOVE

WALTER HAMMON, O.F.M.

*St. Anthony's Guild*

PATERSON, NEW JERSEY

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On Using the Brain                      The Way Home  
Who Believes in Sin Any More?  
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Youth — Springtime of Love

# THE POWER OF LOVE

by

**Walter Hammon, O. F. M.**



*Thoughts on love, the bond of our kinship with the saints; on love as a means of obtaining for the dear ones whom God has taken from us, eternal blessedness, and for ourselves, a tranquil heart, a peaceful life and a happy death.*

St. Anthony's Guild  
Paterson, New Jersey



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## THE POWER OF LOVE

**M**Y FRIEND the architect invited me to inspect the new church he was building. Afterward he asked me, "Well, what do you think of it?" "Oh," I said, "I think it is very fine — a beautiful church." "And what about the details?" he asked. "Do you think it has enough windows? What do you think of the pillars? How about those medallions on the ceiling?" I had to confess I had not particularly noticed the windows or the pillars — and as for the medallions, I had but a confused impression that they were all right.

Afterward the thought struck me: that was a good example of the way most of us go through life, not noticing the things which contribute to its beauty and happiness, only vaguely conscious of the power to do tremendous things. From the dawn of creation the phenomenon of steam existed, and yet thousands of years went by before one man, observing steam escaping from a tea-kettle, put its power to practical use. From his observations came all those mechanisms which depend upon steam for power. Again, the phenomenon of electricity had always

been present in the universe, yet it went undiscovered by countless generations until finally one man harnessed its power and gave us those modern inventions which depend upon electricity.

What is it the saints have caught that makes them different from ourselves? It is simply this: they have understood and utilized a powerful force in the world which the rest of us have taken for granted and neglected. It is not the power of mighty intellect, nor the gift of tongues, nor the knowledge of many languages, nor facility in speaking. It does not depend upon high birth or political influence. It can be grasped by the poorest of the poor. It is available to us all. It is simply the power of love.

We all like to read and speak of love. The three little words "I love you" have more power than any other combination of letters to bring us peace and happiness. There is no heart so cold that love cannot warm it, so depressed that love cannot lift it up, so despairing that love cannot give it hope. There is no grief love cannot soften, nor memory of evil it cannot erase; no sin love cannot pardon, nor wound it cannot cure. It is the mender of broken hearts, the answer to most of life's problems, the anti-

dote for most of its ills. Such is its power that the very omnipotence of God obeys its dictates, His justice is outweighed, and the reign of His mercy rules the earth. When justice demands "Vengeance is mine!" love answers, "Much is forgiven because she has loved much." Love is the secret of the saints; and yet it is no secret, for it is part and parcel of us all.

### IMMORTALITY OF LOVE

The first love anyone can know in the normal course of events is love for his mother. Even before he knows of God he knows of her. As the infant awakens to consciousness of the world in which he lives, his mother's face is the first with which he becomes familiar, the embrace of her arms the first warm bed in which he rests content, the sound of her voice the first of the multitude of sounds he learns to recognize. As his awareness of his surroundings slowly increases, so also does his awareness of her who leads him out of the mists of infancy into the wider world of childhood, where he walks and talks and finally grows into a man.

Many he learns to love. His father early takes his place in the order of affection.

Then other children and grownups are admitted to that intimate ever-increasing circle.

The idea of God is an easy one for his young mind to grasp. The idea of belonging to someone is a familiar one to him; and the idea of belonging to God in turn gives birth to the idea of loving God, even as he loves mother and father and others familiar to him.

Thus love is born and becomes a dominant factor in his life. Loves and hatreds, likes and dislikes, shall dictate the whole course of his days, pick his company for him, choose his work, select the ideals and ambitions he will follow. When the span of his life is complete and his course is run, the objects of his love shall dictate the eternal resting place of his immortal soul and the extent to which he is remembered upon earth.

Love, therefore, is a thing to be cultivated, tenderly nursed, and directed into right channels. Any perversion or misdirection brings pain and regret. That which we call our conscience is the voice of love. When it tells us that we have hurt that which we should have loved, it excites remorse within us. There is no truer contrition than that which comes from the realization that we

have been disloyal to love, whether it be toward God or man. There is no truer love than that which seeks to repair such faithlessness and to prove itself anew. Happily, there is no fall which love cannot repair, no coldness or neglect which love cannot redeem, no heights or depths or distances whatsoever which love cannot reach, no chasms it cannot bridge.

Love, born with the infant, does not die with the man. It penetrates the veil which separates time and eternity. Since man is made to the image and likeness of God, and God is Love, it is in love that that image is most clearly seen. Since God is Love and God is eternal, then love is eternal and that likeness is eternal. Immortal love, undying love, is God's great gift to the creatures whom His love fashioned. His love for mankind made Him pour love into the human heart as into a reservoir from which others might drink; made that reservoir eternal so that the saints might be its channels. This unending love is the foundation of that association which we call the Communion of Saints, and the reason for our devotion to the souls of our dear departed loved ones.

## FOUNTAIN OF LOVE

Life is a thing of joys and sorrows. But there is one place where joy is sweeter, where sorrow is less hard to bear — and that is home.

*Home* — blessed word that fills the weary heart of man with peace; blessed place to which the weary heart of man turns wistfully from every quarter of his travels. How true are the words of the old song,

“’Mid pleasures and palaces though  
we may roam,  
Be it ever so humble, there’s no  
place like home.”

Whether it be an ivy-covered cottage in the country or only a few rooms in a crowded city tenement, nevertheless it is home, the place where loved ones dwell. Though the world has many highways, and the seas of the world are wide, still across miles of earth and across restless seas the eyes of the traveler look fondly back to the warmth of affection, the understanding and peace, that are to be found at home.

What is the foundation of the home? A man and a woman before the altar of God pledge to one another their lifelong trust.

They pledge their vows of love for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, until death shall part them. And then they establish the home in which their children will grow up around them. How blessed is that little spot — how dear the memories which gather around it! The mother, with loving and solicitous eye, watches her babies grow and change. The ailments of their infancy, the joys and cares of their busy school days — these and every other circumstance of their lives become to her the very breath of being. The father, laboring out in the world, labors the more willingly, and with contentment and peace, because of the ever-present thought of home. In the evening when work is over, tired but happy he turns toward that loved spot. His eyes light up, a new spring comes into his step, the cares of the world and the problems of life seem small and far away as his children rush to meet him and throw their arms around him. Day by day home becomes more blessed and more dear — a holy place, not only man's castle but his heaven upon earth.

Then the children grow up and go out into the world. One perhaps will achieve wealth and honor, to the delight of the par-

ents' hearts. Fondly they follow his progress from success to success. And for that one who has attained success, beyond the satisfaction which comes from ambitions realized or the adulation of the crowd, there is a tenderer and deeper satisfaction in the knowledge that the folks at home are pleased, that he has made some return for their love. Between heart and home the old sacred union persists. The memories of that blessed place remain undimmed by time, untarnished by success.

Perhaps there is another, too, the black sheep of the family, yet dearest to the mother's heart. That one most of all is in her prayers. With what joy she welcomes his every return to her — with what love and solicitude she follows his footsteps wherever they may turn. She broods over the thought of him, and from her bruised heart there is forced by her sorrow not so much the bitter essence of disappointment as the sweet nectar of love and compassion.

Death enters the home and some are taken away. Still their memories cling to the very walls; and to those who remain, home becomes ever more dear.

Blessed is the home; dear the memories that cling to the associations of childhood;

magic the spell that love weaves around the growing family. Home is a fountain of love. Yet the tie of affection which binds the members of a family together is a mere type of a still stronger bond, a still higher affection, a more perfect love — the love which does not cease with time or die with things of earth.

#### BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE SAINTS

To His Beloved Disciple, God granted a vision of heaven. St. John, in the Apocalypse, describes it for us thus: "I saw a great multitude which no man could number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands" (Apoc. 7:9).

On the feast of All Saints that vision is placed before us that we may recall the birthright that is ours. The Church Triumphant in heaven, the Church Militant on earth, and the Church Suffering in purgatory form one great organic body, of which God is the head. We are the branches of the Vine which is Jesus Christ.

The Communion of Saints means the family circle of the Church, whose members are bound together by bonds of undying love.

Into that circle we are born by Baptism. We become brothers and sisters of the saints in heaven, of the poor souls in purgatory, and of the faithful on earth. In that circle we grow up and are educated. Our holy Mother the Church follows our progress with loving and solicitous eyes. Even as every good mother nurtures and cares for her child, so Mother Church nurtures and cares for us. When our fallen nature begins to assert itself, she strengthens us by Confirmation. As children run to their mother to have their little bruises treated, so we run to her maternal arms and are made sound again in the Sacrament of Penance. She feeds us with the very Bread of Life in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. She blesses our union in marriage or in the religious life. She kneels by the bed of death to calm our fears and fill our hearts with hope. From the cradle to the grave she is our Mother, loving, devoted, tender, true.

Some of her children grow up to sainthood, and their memory is kept ever green upon her altars. Others of her family must pass through the pains of purgatory until they are purified and cleansed, made worthy to enter the presence of God and live, a saint with the other saints, forever. But for

all her children this holy Mother cherishes an equal love. Her great heart turns with pride and joy and satisfaction to those who have achieved success and rest with God; it turns with pity and compassion to those who linger in the pains of purgatory; it encourages, with a constant solicitude, those who still fight on toward their goal.

What a beautiful example of undying love, of love that stretches beyond the limits of time into eternity, is given to us by our kinship with the saints! There are many birthdays which our nation celebrates, such as that of Washington, the champion of liberty, and that of Lincoln, the martyr for the preservation of our nation's ideals. But the feast of All Saints is a family birthday, a day when we remember with affection *all* our brothers and sisters who have fought for and won the crown of eternal blessedness. Their glory is our glory; their holy example is the model after which we strive to construct our lives; their intercession is our strength; their reward awaits us; their love reaches out to lift us up and shield us lest our birthright of glory be forever lost.

The example of the saints shines as a beacon light, illumining our path through life. They were men and women of flesh and

blood like ourselves. For them, too, the world, the flesh and the devil held out false promises of pleasure. They suffered the same temptations, the same trials, the same sorrows. By faith and hope and charity, by love for God and man, they merited to hear the blessed words: "Enter into the joy of thy Master." What they have done we know we too can do; where they have gone we know we too can go, by following the footsteps they have left clearly printed on the earth. Their powerful help is ours for the asking. While they are the friends of God and live before His face, they are at the same time our brethren, filled with the greatest charity toward us. Not only St. Teresa, but all the saints wish to let fall a shower of roses upon the earth. When we need that inspiration which love can give, we can find it within the bosom of our own family, from these, our own brothers and sisters.

Above all things, the saints remind us of the glorious destiny that is ours. "Do not give way to doubt," they say. "Do not despair; have faith — have hope! Lift up your hearts!" Their robes of eternal blessedness will yet be ours. We need not be dismayed by any wiles of the evil one, nor discouraged by our own weaknesses. We are the brothers

and sisters of the saints, and they will help us through the trials of life and past the gates of death. The death of the body shall be forgotten in the victory of the soul, and we shall sing with them the glad song of the victors: "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Such is our sure hope, founded upon undying love in the Communion of the Saints.

#### HEAVEN OPENED BY LOVE

What is heaven? "Eye has not seen," says St. Paul, "nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love Him" (I Cor. 2:9). So far superior to the ordinary concepts of the human mind are the things of God that any attempt to portray them must ever fall short of reality. Beauty of earth, however, does give us some ground for comparison and thus helps us to get a faint idea of the beauty that is with God.

We hear a magnificent piece of music — perhaps a symphony played by a famous orchestra — and it fills us with enchantment. We close our eyes and give ourselves up to the transporting experience. The cares of the world and the things that trouble us seem far away and of little consequence.

For the time being our souls are bathed in delight and we say, "Ah, this music is divine!"

We see a beautiful painting, a masterpiece of art, and pause to admire it. We feast our eyes upon it and again we exclaim, "Ah, this is perfect — this is heavenly!"

Or again, we climb to the summit of some lofty mountain to view the scene before us. Rolling hills disappear on the far horizon. Valleys far below are checkered with the outlines of farmlands and dotted with tiny homes. White clouds sail like ships across the clear blue of the sky. The very air sparkles like wine as we drink it in. We are thrilled to the depths of our souls by the loveliness of it all. Like Peter, James and John standing upon the summit of Mount Thabor to witness the Transfiguration of our Lord, when His face shone as the sun and His garments became as white as snow, and the voice of God spoke from the heavens like a mighty benediction, "This is my beloved Son," we long to cry out and say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." We are entranced by the vision and wish we could enjoy its beauty forever.

Or we travel upon a ship, and as it cleaves the blue waters of the deep, and brilliant

sunshine pours down upon us, we say, "How sublime — I could go on like this forever!"

Why do we speak so? Why do we feel so? It is because the heart of every man craves for beauty, and harmony, and perfect order, and happiness that has no end.

Long ago, before sin came into the world, there was a time when Adam walked and talked with God in paradise. Then the serpent entered the picture. The will of man was weakened, his intellect was darkened, and there took possession of his mind and body the first fever in the history of our race — the inclination to sin.

When these things are ended, when that weakness of the will is gone, when that darkness of the intellect is removed, and that inclination toward sin no longer exists within us, when we return to walk and talk with God in paradise — that is heaven.

Things of earth may indeed give us passing moments of happiness, when they possess a spark of that harmony and peace and beauty which we seek. But the music ceases; the song ends; we turn with regret from that beautiful painting; we come down from the mountain peak; the ship returns once more to the shore.

Heaven is where our desires are fed with beauty and harmony and order and peace that has no end, that will continue on into the endless ages of eternity. Heaven is love without fear of change, love that shall never die.

What are the strong desires filling every human breast? Certainly, to the Christian heart, these are very powerful desires: to know God completely without the veils of time or space; to love God without fear; to serve Him without the possibility of sin; to enjoy the constant presence of our loved ones without the dread of sickness or death; and to have their constant esteem and affection without the possibility of loss.

Heaven is all this and more besides. No beauty of earth nor any earthly art, no wildest dreams of the mind of man or greatest longings of the saints, has ever yet approached comparison to the things God has prepared for those who love Him. Beyond calculation is the power of love to make our dreams come true.

Love prompts us to desire for our loved ones those same good things we desire for ourselves. The beloved souls in purgatory were also made for God; their souls were fired with the same spark of divinity as our

own. They, too, thrilled at the sight of beauty here on earth and longed to have their desires fulfilled. Now they are closer to that realization. Nothing separates them except the debt they still must pay. All fear is gone, all anxiety is gone, the possibility of sin exists no more. They yearn only for the bliss of complete forgiveness, for the enjoyment of undying love. It is within the power of our love to open the gates of heaven for them. God may take our loved ones out of this world, but He does not take them out of our hearts. He does not put them beyond the reach of our love, nor render that love impotent to help them. Love answers to love, and the vast power of Him Who created the world out of love bends down to answer the pleading prayers which come from human hearts.

A Franciscan hospital chaplain tells of witnessing an eye operation by a famous surgeon. A young man had been blind from birth and the doctor hoped to give him sight. After the operation, the patient lay for many days in his hospital bed, his eyes swathed in bandages while the healing process went on. What hopes and fears, as he lay there waiting, must have surged through his mind! For years he had lived in black-

ness. The loving care of the hands which guided him he could appreciate; but the hands themselves he could not see. Would his whole life now be changed? Would that unknown power called sight be given to him, or would he continue to the end in darkness? The whole hospital staff waited with him in tense concern.

At last the great day came. Slowly, carefully, hopefully, the wrappings were unwound. The moment was at hand. His eyelids fluttered. He dared to open them. A cry of exultation and happiness burst from his lips: "O God, I see! I see!"

It was a marvelous miracle which the skill of that surgeon had wrought. When the happy man tried to thank him, however, the doctor said simply: "Thank God, not me. All the credit belongs to Him."

God had given a wonderful gift, but He had given it through human hands.

Even more wonderful is the miracle which our love can perform for the souls of our dead.

Now, by their perfect faith, they realize as they never could before the infinite beauty and holiness of God. Now, thrilled with hope, they are close to the enjoyment of

never-ending happiness. That moment, desired since first they dreamed of love, is near at hand. They long with a single desire to begin the eternal years of peace. They yearn with the fullness of yearning for deliverance from pain. The pure ardor of charity burns within them for that moment when their joy will be complete.

The merciful love of God has made it possible for loving human hearts to help them, so that the veil which separates them from pardon and peace can be removed. Love urges us to hasten to their relief by our prayers, to remove the bands which bind their eyes, that they may open on celestial light. Then they can cry exultantly at last, "O God, I see! I see the heavenly throne, with God the Father Who created me, Jesus my Blessed Lord, Who redeemed me, the Holy Ghost, Who sanctified me! I see the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, the choirs of angels, the Apostles and Evangelists, the confessors, the bands of martyrs, the white-robed bands of virgins, all the company of the saints of God! And I sing with them at long last that song which they alone can sing who have been washed in the Blood of the Lamb!"

## LOVE REACHES THROUGH THE VEIL

St. John, in his vision of heaven, tells us: "There shall not enter into it anything defiled...but those only who are written in the book of life of the Lamb" (Apoc. 21:27). In other words, none can enjoy eternal life with God until they have been cleansed from every trace of sin.

The need and the suffering of the departed souls, who must be cleansed through pain, gives opportunity for one of the truest manifestations of love: the rendering of help. The urgent necessity and the great value of our help are taught in the doctrine of purgatory.

What *does* the Church teach?

First, that there is a purgatory. We find this great truth in both the Old and the New Testament and in the constant tradition of the Church. It is clearly evident, too, by the light of reason.

In the Old Testament we read that Judas Machabeus, one of the leaders of the chosen people of God, ordered that offerings should be sent to the temple in Jerusalem and sacrifices offered there for his soldiers who had died in battle; for, says Holy Scripture, "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for

the dead, that they may be loosed from sins” (II Mach. 12:46). Offerings for the dead and prayers for the repose of their souls were common practice among the Jews.

Our Lord found this a customary practice during the years He traveled from place to place teaching eternal truth. He did not rebuke it or condemn it, even though of other things He said, “Were it not so, I should have told you.” Indeed, He Himself speaks of sins that shall not be forgiven, “either in this world or in the world to come” (Mt. 12:32). Since nothing defiled can enter heaven, and it is evident from Christ’s words that sins can be atoned for and guilt washed away in the world to come, there must be a place where this is done; where the souls of the dead are detained to be purified and made worthy of the presence of God.

Such has been the constant tradition of the Church since the time of the Apostles. The early Church Fathers speak of the necessity and the practice of praying for the dead. St. Augustine says: “Funeral pomp and a gorgeous tomb, without being the least service to the dead, may indeed offer some kind of consolation to the living. But that which cannot be doubted is that the

prayers of the Church, the Holy Sacrifice, and almsgiving bring them relief and obtain for them mercy.”

It is not a case of the wish being father to the thought. Besides the testimony of Holy Scripture and tradition, there is the conclusion of reason itself. For these admissions must be made in reason: that while those who die in mortal sin, outlaws against their God, deserve the punishments of hell, and those pure souls who die without the least stain of sin deserve to be admitted to the company of the blessed and live in the presence of God, there are others, neither so bad nor so good, who still deserve His loving compassion. While “nothing defiled can enter heaven,” it befits God’s mercy that there be a place of reparation where slight imperfections and the punishment due to forgiven sins can finally be washed away.

The consoling doctrine of purgatory, therefore, teaches us: first, that there is such a place; second, that after the remission of the guilt of sin and of the eternal punishment due to sin has been obtained from God in the Sacrament of Penance, there still remains some temporal punishment due; third, that when one has not made due satisfaction in this world, he can and must make it

after death in purgatory; fourth, that the prayers and good works of the living can be useful to the dead, can soothe and shorten their sufferings; fifth, that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has the effect of satisfying divine justice for both the living and the dead.

We can, then, reach beyond the grave by the power of our love, and bring relief to the souls of our dear ones by prayers and good works, by having the Holy Sacrifice offered for them, by gaining indulgences for them.

This beautiful doctrine, which offers such an outlet for the exercise of love, is a source of twofold consolation to us: it makes us more assured of our own salvation, and gives us an opportunity of helping, even through the veil of death, those who were dear to us in life.

It is infinitely consoling to know that we can help our dead. So often we regret the hasty word, the unkind act. So often our grief is haunted by the memory of our coldness and indifference toward those who should have felt our love. We think of the kindness we *might* have shown, the good we *might* have done, the comforts we *might* have provided. We say over and over again

to ourselves, "If only I had the chance to do it over. If only they could really understand that I loved them."

Yet the remembrance of our dead need not be haunted by these ghosts of wasted opportunities. Change those tears and regrets into prayers for that soul. Follow your dear ones past the portals of death, and by your prayers and good works *show* that you love them. Love gives us the power to soothe their pain and to bring them more speedily before the face of God in the eternal blessedness of the saints, by applying to them the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, divine Lover of souls.

#### TRUE LOVE REMEMBERS

Prayer for the souls of the faithful departed is not only an act of love, it is an act of gratitude. It is a continuance of that bond by which we have been joined, for many years perhaps, to others. It is an expression of the debt which love would pay. True love remembers. We see again the faces of those whom God has taken from us; memories, sometimes painfully sweet, recall their affection for us, the happiness they gave us, the sacrifices they made for us. True love does not forget.

From many pulpits priests have preached to us, on many altars celebrated Mass. Now they have gone before the judgment seat of God. Some we knew very well. They were our intimate friends. Many a time we saw them ascend the altar steps; but now they are gone, numbered among the faithful departed, among those who have died in the Faith but are still perhaps separated from eternal peace. With them may be many others who were once most dear to us — mother or father, brothers or sisters, husband or wife or children — many who were once entwined in our heartstrings.

There was a time when we thrilled at the words of that priest, when our heavy hearts were made glad by his words of absolution in the confessional, when peace flowed into our souls as he raised the Sacred Host on high and we bowed our heads in adoration.

There was a time, dimmed now by the march of years, when our mother was our whole world. Now we have many friends, but once we had only one. Now our world may be as wide as the seven seas, but once it was as small as the shadow our mother cast, limited by the embrace of her arms, and warmed by the strength of her love. She was the sun about which our little universe

revolved. Do we remember? Yes, for love cannot forget. Even as the river whispers ceaselessly of the spring that gave it birth, so memory holds fond recollections of the days when the world was small and mother was its center.

There was a time when that dear father was the best and most beloved companion, when that loved husband shared every joy and sorrow, when that cherished wife made every joy sweeter and every sorrow easier to bear, when parents and children were one happy family together.

Now many of these bonds are broken. Some of those we loved have left our side. When they died, and we saw their bodies laid in the darkness of the earth, from our sorrowing hearts came many a fervent prayer that they might rest in peace, that God might have mercy on their souls.

When the tempest of grief is over and the parting is soothed by time, then, too, love will remember and offer the gift of prayer.

Let me tell you of a most touching act of love performed one Christmas Eve in a Catholic hospital. As anyone knows, it is bad enough to be confined to a hospital at any time; but to be there on Christmas Eve,

when the rest of the world is rejoicing, is hard indeed. Those who have had the experience will recall how the long, lonesome hours dragged by.

To this particular hospital came a choir from one of the neighboring churches. They sang the old familiar Christmas songs — "Silent Night," "Adeste Fideles," "O Little Town of Bethlehem." What a change came over the faces of the sick! It was touching to see them brighten, to see so many wreathed in smiles. One little child in her tiny bed laughed aloud in glee. They had not been forgotten! A simple act of charity had dispelled the lonesomeness and brought radiant peace instead.

And what of those who sang? Their own hearts were the lighter because of the happiness they brought to others. It is doubtful if any other thing on Christmas Day, either gifts received or greetings exchanged with friends, gave them greater joy than the knowledge of their kindly deed.

This simple little episode is a good illustration of the power love possesses to bring joy. Even after death has taken our dearest from us, we can move the heart of God to mercy by going in prayer to their aid in

His hospital — purgatory — where they are detained.

We call them "poor souls," but it is within our power to make them rich. They are truly poor in that they can do nothing for themselves. Knowing now, better than ever, the delights of heaven, they cannot gain it by their own efforts. Wretched indeed are those poor souls for whom no one prays.

We call them "holy souls" because they can never more sin, never suffer eternal loss. But there is none there so holy that he does not need our prayers. Their very holiness only makes their suffering more keen. Their perfect faith makes them realize God's holiness, His love for them, and the blessedness of heaven. Their wonderful hope makes them thirst after heaven, for perfect union with God and His saints. They suffer bitterly the pain of separation. Burning charity only intensifies their bitter grief for past offenses against God and their present unworthiness of Him. It only increases the pain of their frustrated love.

Solitary and homesick, separated on the one hand from us whom they loved on earth, and on the other from God Whom they love in heaven, they look longingly to us for the help our prayers can bring, and cry out in

the words of holy Job: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord has touched me."

"Have pity on me!" that holy priest entreats, "you who joined with me at Mass, you to whose hearts I so often brought peace, on whose tongues I so often laid the Bread of Life."

"Have pity on me!" many a mother and father cry to their children. "Have pity on me, you for whom we worked and watched during the daylight hours, and through the lonely watches of the night."

"Have pity on me, my husband!" "Have pity on me, dear wife! Be still my joy in sorrow, my comfort, my companion. Show now your love."

"You whom I loved so much, you to whom I often gave good counsel, you who were more dear to me than life itself, you for whose sake perhaps I suffer here, have pity on me, have pity on me!"

Not only will our prayers, springing from pity and love, help to bring eternal happiness to our loved ones, but they will bring peace to our own hearts in the knowledge that we have not forgotten the debt of love we owe our dead.

## LOVE PLEADS AT THE ALTAR

One of the most touching stories in the annals of our Faith is the story of St. Monica and her son St. Augustine. The youthful Augustine led a most sinful life. Then came a change. He gave up his evil ways, repented of his sins, underwent complete conversion. He is one of our greatest saints and a Doctor of the Church. In the famed *Confessions*, the story of his life, he relates that it was the devotion of his mother, her wonderful example of virtue, her ceaseless prayers for him, that saved him from eternal ruin.

A short time before her death, this mother and her son sat together talking of heaven. "Son," she said, "what I do here, for what purpose I remain, I do not know. All my hopes in this world are accomplished." Only a few days after this conversation she fell mortally sick. She was far from her native land and from the tomb of her husband, beside whom she had always wished to be buried. But to the surprise of her two sons, who knelt beside her deathbed, she gave these instructions: "Here you shall bury your mother."

They reminded her of her years-long desire to be buried beside her husband. But

Monica turned her eyes upon Augustine and uttered her dying wish: "Lay this body anywhere. Let not the care of that in any way disturb you. This only I request, that you remember me at the altar of God wherever you may be." Then she was still, in the sleep of eternal peace.

St. Augustine tells us that at first he did not weep. Neither at the funeral Mass nor at the grave did he shed a tear. Only later, in the quiet hours when the memory of her sweetness and unceasing devotion overcame him, were the springs unsealed within him. And then he poured forth tears of a different kind — prayers for her soul. Holy as he knew her to be, he would not say that she did not need prayers. Writing of his mother and their beautiful devotion, he concludes with the words that down through the centuries have been the prayer of sorrowing love: "May she rest in peace." And he begs all who in later times shall read the story of her life and death to remember his mother's soul: "that so, through the prayers of many, my mother's last request may be more abundantly fulfilled."

As St. Monica besought her son to remember her, so do our own departed and all the holy souls entreat us to remember them, at

the altar where the Body and Blood of our Redeemer pleads for them, that God may grant them remission of their penitential suffering and a speedy union with Him. By means of the Holy Sacrifice our love is able to hasten their release from purgatory, thus augmenting the number of the blessed in heaven, to God's greater glory. For the Holy Sacrifice is a repetition of the sacrifice on Calvary; even as on the cross the good thief won the glorious promise, "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise," so through the Sacrifice of the Mass heaven is thrown open to souls.

The best gift our love can offer for the souls of the departed is to remember them at that moment when their Crucified Redeemer immolates Himself upon the altar for the sins of all mankind. When the priest raises the consecrated Host to be adored by the faithful, he raises It too to plead as a suppliant before the throne of the Most High. When he elevates the Chalice with the Precious Blood of Christ, he offers It too, as Christ did. "For this is the Chalice of My Blood," he says, "of the new and eternal covenant; the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and for many unto the forgiveness of sins." After the consecration,

when the Body and Blood of the Saviour are present on the altar before him, there in the very presence of God, the priest prays for all who have preceded us, who, marked by the sign of faith in Baptism now sleep in the sleep of peace — that to these and to all who rest in Christ may be granted a place of refreshment, light, and peace.

Human love pleads with divine Love, and obtains its reward from the merciful love of God.

In this lies the great power of love — that it can obtain for those whom God has taken from us a speedier entrance into the joys of eternal life, and obtain for us a tranquil heart, a peaceful life and a happy death.



# GUILD PAMPHLETS

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