

Radiant and Unfading

Take-Home • Session 3: The Souls of the Righteous

What We Found

Nine verses, and the Church reads them beside open graves. But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. We found where that hand appears elsewhere in Scripture: into your hand I commit my spirit (Psalm 31:5), prayed by Jesus as his dying words, into your hands (Luke 23:46). In the eyes of the foolish, the foolish whose outlook was voiced in chapter 2, the righteous seemed to have died; the author answers each of the world's verdicts with a simple contrast: they are at peace. Their hope is full of immortality.

Verse 6 says that like gold in the furnace God tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. Fire does not destroy gold; it frees it from everything that is not gold. We discovered St. Peter using the same image for suffering Christians: the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire (1 Peter 1:6-7). God's love does not only forgive us; it purifies us, because his goal is a soul made ready for himself. That same principle is the basis of the Church's teaching on purification, in this life and after death: God can use suffering, and finally his own purifying love, to finish in us what his mercy began. And the passage ends where heaven ends: the faithful will abide with him in love.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch • *Letter to the Romans* (c. AD 107)

On the road to his execution: I am God's wheat, to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Wisdom 3:6 lived out loud, a death understood as an offering God would accept.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great • *Dialogues*, 4.39 (6th century)

For certain lesser faults there is a purifying fire before the final judgment, since the Lord speaks of a sin not forgiven either in this age or in the age to come. The Catechism quotes this passage in its teaching on purgatory (CCC 1031). Purification, on this teaching, is not a second chance for the condemned; it is the finishing of the saved.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 41.5 (4th century)

Do not hesitate to help the departed and to offer prayers for them. The Catechism cites his words in teaching that our prayer can help the dead (CCC 1032). If their souls are in the hand of God, loving them across death's border is family business.

Live It This Week

- **Read ahead, slowly.** Read Wisdom 3:10 through 4:20 with a pencil. Mark every person the world would call unlucky, and what God calls them instead.
- **Pray for your dead by name.** Each day this week, name your beloved dead before God, one by one. Consider having a Mass offered for one of them; the parish office can arrange it in two minutes.
- **Memorize the verse.** Commit Wisdom 3:1 to heart. Someday you will stand beside someone at a graveside, and it may be a deeply fitting word to pray, entrusting the one you have lost to the God who holds the righteous in his hand.
- **Visit if you can.** If a cemetery holds someone you love, visit this week. Stand at the grave and pray the memory verse there, entrusting them to God in hope.

Memory Verse

"But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them." (**Wisdom 3:1**)

Before next session: read Wisdom 3:10 through 4:20.

Catechism references: CCC 1012, CCC 1030-1032.

Scripture We Opened

- Tonight's text: Wisdom 3:1-9 (read whole, then revisited in movements: 3:1-4, 3:5-6, 3:7-9)
- The discovery: Psalm 31:5 (into your hand) and Luke 23:46 (into your hands, I commit my spirit)
- The discovery: 1 Peter 1:6-7 (gold tested by fire)
- Deuteronomy 33:3 (in his hand)
- Proverbs 17:3 (the furnace is for gold, the LORD tries hearts)
- Malachi 3:2-3 (the refiner and purifier of silver)
- Daniel 12:2-3 (the wise shall shine)
- Matthew 13:43 (the righteous will shine like the sun)
- Matthew 19:28 (the Twelve on thrones); 1 Corinthians 6:2 and Revelation 20:6 (the saints judge and reign)
- Revelation 21:27 (nothing unclean shall enter)
- 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (saved, but only as through fire)
- Matthew 12:32 (forgiveness in the age to come)
- Hebrews 10:14 and 2 Corinthians 5:8
- 2 Maccabees 12:44-45 (prayer for the dead)