

Saint Gregory the Great

540 - 604

PURGATORY

Saint Gregory the Great also described in his *Dialogues* some apparitions of the Souls of Purgatory. The most important apparition, narrated in the Book IV of the *Dialogues*, is the one of the monk Justus who died in the monastery of Rome, where Gregory was superior, before being elected Pope. Gregory was made aware that the monk Justus had sinned against the vow of poverty, because he had kept for himself three gold coins given to him by a benefactor, without the permission of the superior. Thus Gregory decided to punish him to instill in him repentance and to be an example for the entire community. Justus thus incurred excommunication and once dead, Gregory ordered that he be buried outside the conventual cemetery.

Gregory recounted the episode like this: "After 30 days had passed since the death of the monk Justus I experienced a feeling of compassion towards the poor deceased fellow friar; I contemplated with much sorrow his pains in Purgatory and thought of a way to liberate him from them. Thus I called Pretiosus, the prior of our monastery, and filled with sorrow I said to him: 'It has been a long time now that the deceased fellow friar is tormented in Purgatory; we must offer him a work of charity, for what is possible for us to liberate him from his pains. Therefore go, and offer for him the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for 30 consecutive days, so that there may never be a day when the Holy Mass would not be celebrated for him.' Pretiosus did as he had been commanded. Now while we were involved in other things and had not counted the days, one time at night the

monk Justus appeared in a vision to his biological brother Copiosus. When Copiosus saw him he asked: 'What is it brother, how are you? (how are things going with you)?' That man answered: 'So far things have gone very badly for me, but now, I am well; because today I was received in the Communion of Saints in Heaven.' Promptly Brother Copiosus recounted the occurrence to his fellow friars in the monastery. Then they counted carefully the days and behold it was precisely the thirtieth day on which the Holy Mass for him was celebrated. While Copiosus did not know anything about it and the fellow friars did not know anything about the vision of Copiosus, he was made aware of what the fellow friars had done and they were told of what he had seen."

From the story of the vision of the monk Justus liberated from Purgatory after Saint Gregory the Great asked to celebrate in his supplication 30 consecutive Masses, originated the pious practice of the "Gregorian Masses". In Book IV of the *Dialogues*, besides the account of the monk Justus, Gregory also tells about a deceased man who had appeared to a priest and had asked him for help: "The priest made penance for a week with much weeping for the benefit of the deceased and celebrated for him the Holy Sacrifice and then did not find him anymore in the place where he had seen him earlier for many days."

In chapter 39 of the book of *Dialogues*, where Saint Gregory proves with scriptural arguments the existence of a Purgatory after death, he affirms: "It must be known



that, there in Purgatory no one can obtain even the remission of the smallest venial sins, if here on earth he did not first merit it with good works! No one receives, if he did not give first!"

The Blessed Peter Faber was convinced that if Saint Gregory had not spoken about Purgatory with such eloquence, the devotion towards those souls would not have developed. For this each time that the Blessed encouraged the devotion to the Souls of Purgatory, he invited the faithful also to pray to Saint Gregory.

