

# Caesar of Heisterbach

Part 2

1180 ca-1240 ca

PURGATORY

The story by Caesar of Heisterbach, reported in the *Dialogus magnus visionum et miraculorum* (*Great dialogue of visions and miracles*), continues: “But the man answered: ‘Sir, I know the Scriptures. I often heard read that evil is not comparable to the mercy of God, because God had said through the prophet Ezekiel: Each time that a sinner repents of his sins, he is saved and also: I do not desire the death of a sinner, but that he converts and lives!

“And therefore I beg you because of God’s mercy to give me the proper penance.’ And the priest answered: ‘I don’t know which penance to give you, because you are by now a lost man.’ But the one who had been once a monk answered: ‘Sir, I am not worthy to receive a penance from you and therefore I will give myself a penance. Then I choose two thousand years in purgatory, so that after these two thousand years I can obtain the grace before God!’ As he was between two extremes – the fear of hell and the hope of eternal life – he went back to beg the priest: ‘Since you have denied me absolution, I ask you at least not to deprive me of the consolation of the holy Viaticum of the Holy Supper!’

“The disconcerted and senseless priest answered: ‘I did not have the courage to give you a penance, how can I now bring you the Body of the Lord?’ Since the priest did not want to grant him any of the two Sacraments, the unfortunate

dying man made him yet another request: ‘I want to write on a sheet how things are going for me; afterwards you will have to take it to the bishop, who is my relative. I hope that he will pray for me!’ And finally, the priest promised to fulfill this request.

“The ex-monk died repented and went to Purgatory. The priest went to the bishop and delivered him the letter from the deceased. As soon as the bishop had read it he cried bitter tears and said: ‘Never have I loved a man so tenderly. I suffered when he entered the convent. I suffered when he became unfaithful. Now I suffer for his death! I have loved him as living. I must love him also as dead. Since he died repented and hence we must help him, I cannot deny him the prayers of my diocese!’ He then wrote to abbots, priors of monasteries, prelates, deans and pastors and to all those who were involved in the care of souls asking them to pray for the deceased. He wrote also to the monasteries of women; he begged those near him personally and the other ones in writing, to be willing to have special prayers, ordered by him throughout the year, for the peace of the soul of the deceased. The bishop, not satisfied with just this, celebrated the Holy Mass daily, offering alms and prayers for the liberation of that soul from Purgatory. And when due to sickness or other reasons he could not celebrate in person, he had another priest do it in his name!”

