

# Saint Bede the Venerable

672/673 ca.-735

PURGATORY

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Saint Bede refers to numerous visions of the Souls of Purgatory, like the one had by Saint Fursey, the Irish monk who died in about 650 in Péronne in France. During his sojourn in the monastery founded by him in Cnobresborough, the Saint became ill and had a vision. He saw underneath him four fires: that of Falsehood, Covetousness, Discord, and Injustice. Some demons were arguing with the Angels over the souls of the dead. Three angels defended the holy monk from the fires and from the demons, but before he was well protected, a devil succeeded in burning him on one shoulder and his jaw. When the vision was over, Saint Fursey came back to his body, and was left with a terror of the fire he experienced.

Another episode narrated by Saint Bede is that which has as the protagonist Drythelm, a worldly man, father of a family, who lived in Cunningham near Scotland. He was sick and died, but at sunrise he returned to life and all those who were keeping vigil to his corpse fled, except for his wife. Drythelm decided to give one third of his wealth to his wife, one third to his children, and one third to the poor, and then he withdrew to the monastery of Mailros. He recounted like this that which happened to him: a figure, dressed in white, accompanied him to a

very wide valley surrounded on the left by frightening flames and on the right by torments of hail and snow. The forceful winds made the souls which were there pass continually from one side to the other. He believed himself to be in Hell, but his guide told him no. Walking, he encountered more, always in dark places, where he would see only the luminous figure. He arrived in a place where he saw balls of fires come out of and fall into a water well, and souls that rose and fell in the flames with great torment. Drythelm caught sight of demons that were inflicting pain on five souls, among whom he recognized a religious, a man, and a woman. The demons wanted to seize him, but the luminous figure saved him and led him towards a place always more luminous.

He entered into a prairie where there were souls dressed in white who were talking amongst themselves. He thought then that he had arrived in Heaven, but the guide told him no. Then proceeding, he reached a light even more bright and where an intense perfume surrounded him. The luminous figure then said to him: "Do you know what all we have seen?" "The horrendous valley full of ardent flames and of glacial cold is the place where the souls of criminals are examined and punished, that they have repented only on the point of



death and they left their bodies in these conditions; however, at least they did confess and have done penitence, so that on Judgment Day they will reach the Kingdom of the Heavens. Of great help to them are the prayers of the living, almsgiving, fasting, and above all, the celebration of Mass, to be liberated even before the Day of Judgment."

