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# FROM THE DARK WOOD TO THE BEATIFIC VISION: JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT WITH DANTE

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## Part 3: “.. he goes in search of freedom”



**St Columba's, Culloden**  
**Wednesday 7 March 2018**

## What is Purgatory?

“All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1030)

## The Seven Deadly Sins

- Pride; Envy; Anger; Sloth; Avarice; Gluttony; Lust.
- The Seven Deadly Sins are negative attitudes, distortions of the Spirit, which prevent us from being truly alive.
- In *Purgatorio*, Dante the pilgrim will begin an ascent up Mount Purgatory, which is composed of seven distinct terraces, each one dedicated to a Deadly Sin.

## On the Shore of Mount Purgatory

“Go then, make sure you gird him  
with a straight reed and bathe his face,  
to wipe all traces of defilement from it.” (*Purg.* 1: 92-94)

- The reed is a Christian symbol of humility, without which Dante cannot climb higher.
- Psalm 114: “When Israel went forth from Egypt” – the psalm celebrates the deliverance of the people of Israel from captivity.
- If Hell is like the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, then Purgatory stands for all the years the Israelites spent in the desert.

## Ante-Purgatory

### The Late Repentant – Contumacious (Stubborn)

“As I lay there, my body torn by these  
two mortal wounds, weeping, I gave my soul  
to Him Who grants forgiveness willingly.  
Horrible was the nature of my sins,  
but boundless mercy stretches out its arms  
to any man who comes in search of it” (*Purg.* 3: 118-123)

- Manfred (1232-1266), natural son of Frederick II, killed at the battle of Benevento (26 February 1266).

## **The Late Repentant – Violent Deaths**

There I went blind. I could no longer speak,  
but as I died, I murmured Mary's name,  
and there I fell and left my empty flesh. (*Purg.* 5: 100-102)

- Buonconte da Montefeltro, son of Guido (*Inf.* 27). Buonconte was killed at the battle of Campaldino (1289); Dante fought on the opposing side.

## **The First Terrace: Pride**

- Pride is at the very base of Mount Purgatory, because it is the foundation of all the other sins.
- Planned Parenthood vs. Casey (1992):  
“At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”
- Punishment: the souls of the proud have to carry big boulders on their backs around the base of Mount Purgatory.
- Dante meets Oderisi da Gubbio (c. 1240-1299?), a manuscript illuminator:  
“Your earthly fame is like the green in grass:  
it comes and goes, and He who makes it grow  
green from the earth will make it fade again.”  
And I to him: “Your words of truth have humbled  
my heart; they have reduced my swollen pride. (*Purg.* 9: 115-119)
- Marian Counter-example: the virtue of humility, as seen in the Annunciation: “Be it done unto me according to your word.”

## **The Second Terrace: Envy**

- “Envy is sorrow at another person's good’ (St Thomas Aquinas).
- Punishment: the souls of the envious are sitting on the edge of a mountain, dressed in coarse haircloth, their eyelids sewn tightly shut with wire.

“But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.” (1 *Corinthians* 12: 24-26)

“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work.” (Prayer of Blessed John Henry Newman)

- Marian Counter-Example: The Wedding Feast at Cana: “Do whatever He tells you.”

### **The Third Terrace: Wrath**

- “Anger is the unreasonable desire for vengeance” (St Thomas Aquinas).
- Punishment: the souls of the angry are inundated with smoke; they cough and splutter, and are unable to see.
- Dante and Virgil meet Marco Lombardo, who speaks of Free Will:

The spheres initiate your tendencies:  
not all of them—but even if they did,  
you have the light that shows you right from wrong,

and your Free Will, which, though it may grow faint  
in its first struggles with the heavens, can still  
surmount all obstacles if nurtured well.

You are free subjects of a greater power,  
a nobler nature that creates your mind,  
and over this the spheres have no control.

So, if the world today has gone astray,  
the cause lies in yourselves and only there! (*Purg.* 16: 73-83)

- Marco Lombardo on the state of the world:

As you can see, bad leadership has caused  
the present state of evil in the world,  
not Nature that has grown corrupt in you.

On Rome, that brought the world to know the good,  
once shone two suns that lighted up two ways:  
the road of this world and the road of God.

The one sun has put out the other’s light;  
the sword is now one with the crook—and fused  
together thus, must bring about misrule,

Tell the world this: The church of Rome, which fused  
two powers into one, has sunk in muck,  
defiling both herself and her true role. (*Purg.* 16: 103-111; 127-29)

- Marian Counter-Example: Mary finding the Child Jesus in the Temple, after three days of searching.