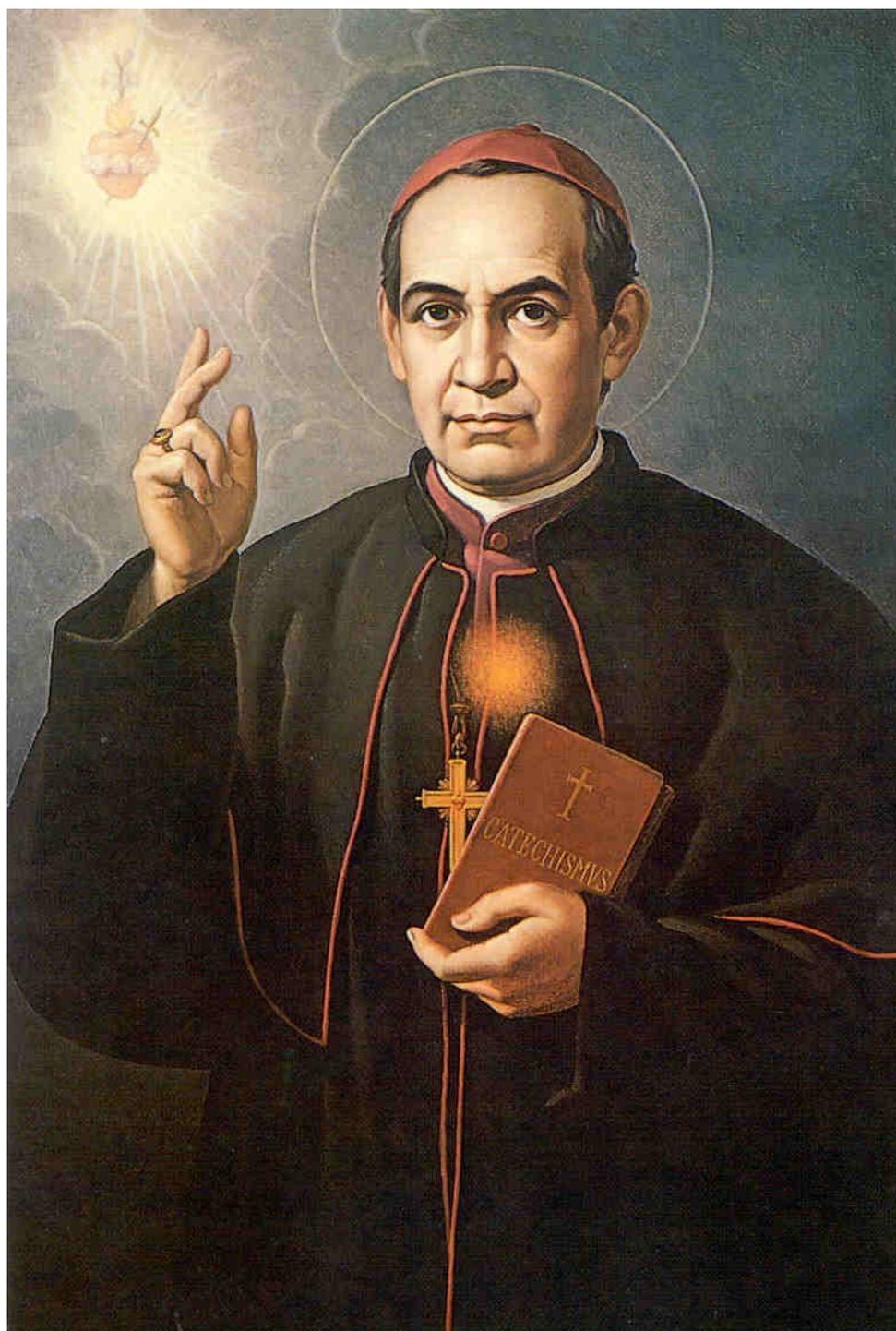


The torments of Hell

Taken from the writings of

Santo Antônio Maria Claret



The feeling of the torments of hell is essentially terrible

It looks, O my soul, like a dark night on the top of a high mountain. Down there is a deep valley, and the earth opens up so that, with your gaze, you can see hell and its depth. It looks like a prison located in the center of the earth, many kilometers below, full of fire, imprisoned in a room so impenetrable that, for all eternity, not even the smoke can escape. In this prison the condemned are close to each other like bricks in an oven ... Imagine the heat of the fire in which they are burned.

First, the fire spreads everywhere and tortures the body and soul entirely. A condemned person remains in hell forever in the same place that he was destined by divine justice, without being able to move, like a prisoner in a log.

The fire that surrounds you totally, like a fish in water, burns you around, on your left, on your right, above and below. His head, his chest, his shoulders, his arms, his hands and his feet are completely invaded by the fire, so that he resembles a piece of glowing, glowing iron that has just been removed from the oven. The roof of the enclosure where the condemned people live is fire; the food you eat is fire; the drink you take is fire, the air you breathe is fire, everything you see and touch is fire ...

But this fire is not simply outside of it; besides, it passes through the condemned person. It invades your brain, your teeth, your tongue, your throat, your liver, your lungs, your intestines, your belly, your heart, your veins, your nerves, your bones, including the marrow, as well as the blood.

“In hell - according to St. Gregory the Great - there will be a fire that cannot be extinguished, a worm that does not die, an unbearable smell, a darkness that can be felt, punishment by scourging wild hands, with all those present desperate for anything good.”

One of the most terrible facts is that, by divine power, this fire goes as far as to act on the faculties (aptitudes) of the soul, burning and tormenting them. Suppose I was placed in a blacksmith's oven, so that my whole body was in midair, except for an arm that is set on fire, and that God was going to preserve my life for a thousand years in this position. Wouldn't this be unbearable torture? What would it be like then to be completely invaded and surrounded by fire, which affects not just one arm, but also all the faculties (aptitudes) of the soul?

It is more amazing than man can imagine

Second, this fire is much more astonishing than man can imagine. The natural fire that we see during this life has great power to burn and torment. Nevertheless, this is not even a shadow of hellfire. There are two reasons why the fire of hell is so much more atrocious, which goes beyond comparison, than the fire of this world.

The first reason is the justice of God, of which the fire of hell is an instrument directed to punish the infinite evil caused against his supreme majesty, which was despised by a creature. Therefore, justice supplies this element with a power so great that it almost reaches the infinite.

The second reason is the malice (wickedness) of sin. As God knows that the fire of this world is not enough to punish sin as it deserves, He has given the fire of hell a power so great that it can never be understood by human intelligence. Do you understand now, how effectively this fire burns?

The fire burns so effectively, - O my soul! - that, according to the great masters of the ascetic school, if a single spark fell on a millstone, it would be reduced in an instant to dust. If it fell on a bronze ball, it would melt instantly as if it were wax. If it fell on a frozen lake, it would boil immediately.

Let us pause briefly, O my soul, so that you may answer some questions that I will ask you.

First, I ask you: If a special oven were to be accessed, as is usually done to torment martyrs, and then some men would place before you all kinds of goods that the human heart might desire, and guarantee the offer of a prosperous kingdom. - if all this were promised to you in exchange for you to enter the burning oven for only half an hour, what would you choose to do?

Not for a hundred kingdoms! “Ah! - you would say - “if you offered me a hundred kingdoms, I would never be so stupid as to accept such brutal extremes, no matter how many important things they offered me, even if I was sure that God would preserve my life during these moments of suffering.”

Second, I ask you: If you were already in possession of a great kingdom, and you were swimming in a sea of wealth, so that you would need nothing, and you would be attacked by an enemy, taken prisoner and chained, if you were obliged choosing between losing your kingdom or spending half an hour in an incandescent oven, what would you choose?

“Ah! - you would say - I prefer to spend my whole life in extreme poverty and submit myself to any injury and unhappiness than to suffer such great torment!”

A prison of eternal fire

In this instant, direct your thoughts from what is temporal to what is eternal. To escape the torment of a burning oven, which would only last half an hour, you would sacrifice any property, especially the things that most satisfy you, and would be willing to

suffer any other temporal damage, no matter how hard it might be. So, why don't you think the same way when you argue about eternal torments?

God does not threaten you with half an hour of torment in the burning oven, but, on the contrary, with an eternal prison of fire. In order to escape from it, shouldn't you renounce everything that is forbidden by Him, no matter how pleasant it may be, and happily embrace everything that He commands, even if it was extremely unpleasant? The most amazing thing about hell is its duration. The condemned person loses God and loses him for eternity. In fact, what is eternity? O my soul, until now no angel can understand what eternity is! How then can you understand it? Still, to form an idea about it, consider the following truths:

Eternity never ends

This is the truth that has made even the greatest saints tremble. The final judgment will come, the world will be destroyed, the earth will swallow all the damned, and they will be thrown into hell. Then, with his all-powerful hand, God will lock them up forever in such a cursed prison.

Since then, as many millennia have passed as there are leaves on trees and plants all over the earth, so many thousands of years, as there are drops of water in all the seas and rivers of the earth, so many years with atoms in the air, as there are grains of sand on all beaches of all seas. So, after all these countless years have passed, what will eternity be?

However, it will not be even a hundredth part of it, or a thousandth - nothing. Then it will begin again and last as long as before, again, and so on, until it has been repeated a thousand times, and a billion times, again. And right after such a long period of time, it won't even be half past, not even a hundredth part or a thousandth part, not even part of eternity. In all this time there will be no interruption in the burning of the condemned, starting all over again.

Oh! what a profound mystery! A terror over all terrors! Oh! eternity! Who can understand you?

Suppose that, in the case of damn Cain, crying in hell only shed a single tear every thousand years. Now, my soul, keep your thoughts and consider this fact: for at least six thousand years, Cain has been in hell and has shed only six tears, which God miraculously preserved for him.

How many years would it take for your tears to cover all the valleys of the earth and flood all the cities, towns and villages and all the mountains until it flooded the entire land? We know that the distance between the earth and the sun is thirty-four million leagues. How many years would it take for Cain's tears to fill this immense space? From earth to heaven we estimate that there is a distance of one hundred and sixty million leagues.

Cain's tears

Oh! God! How many years would we have to imagine that it would take to fill this immense space with tears? And yet - Oh! Incomprehensible truth! - be sure of this, because God cannot lie - the time would come when Cain's tears would be enough to flood the world, to reach even the sun, to touch the sky, and to fill the entire space between the earth and the highest from the sky. This, however, is not all.

If God dried up all these tears from the last drop, and Cain started crying again, he would fill the entire space again and flood him a thousand times and a million times in succession, over all those countless years, not even half an eternity would have passed, not even a fraction. After all this time, burning in hell, Cain's sufferings would be just beginning. Eternity, in this case, has no relief. It would indeed be a small consolation, of very little benefit, for the condemned people, if they were able to receive a brief breath every thousand years.

There is no relief

Imagine a place in hell where there are three bad guys. The first is submerged in a lake of sulfuric fire; the second is trapped in a large stone and is being tormented by two demons, one of whom constantly throws molten lead at his throat, while the other spills over his entire body, covering him from the head to the feet. The third reprobate is being tortured by two snakes, one of which surrounds him with his body and bites him cruelly, while another enters his body and attacks his heart. Suppose God takes pity on him and gives him a short breath.

The first man, after a thousand years has passed, is removed from the lake and he receives the comfort of drinking cold water, and after an hour has passed, he is again thrown into the lake. The second, after a thousand years of torment, is removed from its place and allowed to rest, but after an hour it is thrown back into the same torment. The third, after a thousand years, gets rid of snakes; however, after an hour of relief, he is raped and tormented by them again. Ah! how limited this consolation would be - to suffer for a thousand years to rest only for an hour!

In fact, hell doesn't even have this consolation. Everyone always burns in these frightening flames and never receives any relief in all eternity. The condemned is corroded and hurt by remorse, and will never have a rest in all eternity. You will always suffer from a very scorching thirst and will never receive the freshness of a little water in all eternity. You will always contemplate yourself detested by God and you will never be able to receive the joy of a simple look of tenderness from God for all eternity. The condemned will always feel cursed by heaven and hell, and will never receive a simple gesture of friendship.

It is one of the essential misfortunes of hell that all torment will be without consolation, without medicine, without interruption, without an end, eternal.

The kindness of his mercy

Now I understand in part, O my God, what hell is. It is a place of excessive torment, of extreme hopelessness. It is the place where I deserve to be because of my sins, where I would have been banished for a few years, if your immense mercy had not set me free. I will repeat a thousand times: The Heart of Jesus has loved me, or, otherwise, now I would be in hell! The Blood of Jesus has reconciled me to Heavenly Father, or my home would be hell. This is the song I wanted to sing to You, my God, for all eternity. Yes, from now on, my intention is to repeat these words as many times as the times have followed since that damn hour when I offended you for the first time.

What has been my gratitude to God for the kind mercy He has shown me? He saved me from hell. Oh! Immense love! Oh! Infinite goodness! After such a great benefit, shouldn't I give you my whole heart and love it with the love of the most inflammatory seraph? Shouldn't I direct all my actions towards Him and, in everything, seek only to please the divine will, accepting all contradictions with joy, so that I can return my love to him?

I could do something less than that after such great kindness! Oh! Ingratitude, deserving of another hell! I will leave you alone, my God! I will resist your mercy, committing new sins and offenses. I know that I have done evil, my God, and I repent with all my heart. Ah! if I could shed a sea of tears for such an offensive ingratitude! O Jesus, have mercy on me, since I have now decided better: to suffer a thousand deaths than to offend you again.

“In fact, that take advantage of man winning the whole world and ruin your life?”

Mc 8,36

“It would be better for that man not to have been born!”

Mt 26,4b