

Question: What will Purgatory be like?

1. The Fathers taught it - Purgatory is usually associated with medieval Catholicism, but it's been believed by the Church from the earliest times. Though they may not have actually used the term purgatory, it's clear that many Church Fathers believed in it nonetheless.
2. Souls in purgatory will know their fate - One wonders, if a faithful Christian dies and finds himself suffering in the afterlife, will he be able to tell the difference between hell and purgatory? Will he know that he is heaven-bound? On this issue, the answer seems a decisive yes.
3. Souls in purgatory may be praying for us - We are often rightly told to pray for the souls in purgatory. But some think they may also be praying for us. It makes sense if you think about it: they are, after all, closer to God than we, and therefore their petitions may have greater intercessory power.
4. Souls in purgatory will be with other believers - We tend to forget that souls in purgatory are not suffering alone—otherwise the term the Church Suffering would be emptied of meaning. We can only speculate, but it seems reasonable to surmise that the souls in purgatory will be able to console each other much as we do now on earth.
5. Those in purgatory are united with Christ - Again, purgatory is not some kind of spiritual time-out or bypass from our lives of faith on earth and the beatific vision we yearn for in heaven. If the souls in purgatory are indeed truly part of the Church Suffering, then it follows they remain a part of the mystical body of Christ and therefore remain united to Him. How much closer will they become to the Crucified Christ in the suffering of purgatory! We tend to hear a lot about union with Christ among the most saintly in this life, but the obvious potential for a profound union in purgatory seems to be largely overlooked.
6. The suffering is voluntary - St. Catherine of Genoa, author of a treatise on purgatory, says that once the soul sees what is in store in heaven, immediately casts itself into purgatory. Of course, purgatory is not voluntary in the sense that someone could choose not to go there. But it is voluntary in the sense that souls submit willingly to it, which is what Aquinas also says.
7. Christ consoles those in purgatory
8. Purgatory makes saints

This conclusion, as radical as it may sound, is inevitable. Here's why—the basic Catholic doctrine on who ends up in heaven and who goes to purgatory can be simply stated this way: those who have reached such a state of sanctity that they do not need the purifying fires of purgatory go straight to heaven. We call them, fittingly, saints. Put another way: only saints get into heaven. That's what purgatory does: it makes all of us who will end up there into saints. That's the beauty of the Church's teaching on purgatory.