

Saint Peter Damian

Part 1

1007-1072

PURGATORY

The great Doctor of the Church, Cardinal and writer Saint Peter Damian was born at Ravenna in 1007. He distinguished himself for the help he offered to the Souls of Purgatory. His biographer John of Lodi recounts that the little orphan Peter Damian had found by chance a coin, and instead of keeping it he gave it to a priest, so that he would celebrate a Mass for his deceased parents.

When he was elected superior of the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, he established that the monks, at the hour of prayer of the breviary, had to recite also a type of office for the deceased. He involved all his community in offering supplications for the souls of Purgatory and in the various monasteries he founded, the remembrance of the deceased friars was foremost. He had numerous Masses celebrated; he devoted himself to several penitential exercises and good works. From a letter of Peter Damian to the Abbey of Pomposa, near Ravenna, we know that he tried to join in the prayer society of that monastery. At Montecassino he wanted to particularly commit himself to offering supplications for the souls of the deceased monks like it was done at the other monasteries.

He wrote the booklet "On various and fantastic stories and apparitions" for his friend Abbot Desiderio, who was the superior of the Monastery of Montecassino since 1058. In this work Peter Damian recounted various experiences of the souls in Purgatory. In Chapter V he shared that Severinus, Bishop of Cologne, had been

favored by God with the gift of miracles and even after his death, had appeared to one of his canons completely encircled by flames.

When this canon asked him why he – whose memory was so vivid on earth and his name was honored and blessed in all the churches – had to suffer such terrible punishments in that place of purification, the Bishop who had appeared to him answered: "I don't suffer this punishment for no other reason than because when I was at the Court of the Emperor, as Court Counselor, I did not recite the hours of the divine office at the times established by the Church (canonical hours). Being extremely busy myself and overburdened with work, I had acquired the habit of reciting the entire office of the day in the morning, one part after the other, to allow myself then to devote completely to my work and my commitments. It is due to this transgression of the ecclesiastical norms that I must now suffer tremendously and atone. But you, please, go and tell it to the other priests of the church and the other pious people how much I suffer, and plead with them to assist me with prayers and alms and with the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Then I shall be liberated certainly and soon from these punishments!" Saint Peter Damian commented the story like this: "All of this must inspire in us a great fear, seeing that such a holy man, only for a behavior and a sin which seem so small to us, had to suffer such a terrible Purgatory!"

