

# The Ghost of Guy

*anon*

*a fourteenth century Middle English verse translation of an account  
of a ghostly visitation that took place at Alés, in southern France, in  
the months before Easter 1324*

**Translated and retold in Modern English prose**

**by**

**Richard Scott-Robinson**

This account has been translated and retold from: Foster, Edward E (Ed), 2004. Three Purgatory Poems: The Gast of Gy, Sir Owain, The Vision of Tundale. Medieval Institute Publications. TEAMS Middle English texts. The Middle English text is from Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson Poet 175, of about 1350.

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# The Ghost of Guy

anon

*Middle English version dating to sometime around 1350*

Saint Michael, the aungell clere · And Saint Austyn, the doctour dere · And other maisters mare and myn · Sais that men gret mede may wyn · (And namely clerkes, that kan of lare) · If thai thair connyng will declare · Unto lewed men that kan les · And namely thing that nedefull es – Saint Michael, as well as Saint Augustine and many other men of eminence, have said that scholars (and particularly those who are well-read and erudite) receive a huge reward if they properly explain their knowledge and understanding to those who are less able than themselves to benefit from the long period of study that is required in order to achieve such understanding; and namely, how to obtain remission for sins and to gain entry into heaven, which is, after all, the most important thing anyone can know! Books written by these scholars guide us on how to abandon sin and thus save our souls and lead our lives as holy books tell us to. And because God wishes that everybody should believe in certain things, such as the Day of Judgment and that a man shall receive his reward and be damned or saved according to his deeds in this present world, therefore He has brought before us many examples to learn from while we are still here on Earth, to give us a sight of the true path and to encourage us to live a clean life and to go to heaven when it is time.

*Recorded in Latin in the first half of the fourteenth century and swiftly translated into many languages, including Middle English, this story of a ghostly visitation recounts events that took place, so it is claimed, in the four months between Christmas 1323 and Easter 1324 in the town of Alés, in southern France.*

*This tale in Middle English is preserved also in British Library MS Cotton Tiberius E. vii dating to the second quarter of the fourteenth century, and in Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson Poet 175, dating to around 1350.*

In November of the year 1323, in the town of Alés in southern France, a town official whose name was Guy, sadly died. However, his ghost became lamentably active only a little over a week after his burial. He appeared before his wife and terrified her, scaring her day and night, although she could only hear his voice and could not see him. She could hear dreadful sounds in the room where they had often slept. The distress this caused her was almost more than she could endure.

Her house became a place of torment for her. She could not even be sure whether it was the ghost of Guy himself she was hearing or some fiend trying to kill her! When she could stand it no more, she sought out a house of Dominican friars who used to go around preaching in that city; they were good and respectable men and she approached their prior, one Jean Gobi, with the tale of the horrors she was experiencing. This was two days after Christmas Day, and she told him everything—how she was being frightened out of her wits by this spirit and how she hardly dared to stay in the house and that she hoped that it was the spirit of her late husband and thought that it was, for she often

heard it in the room where Guy himself had spent much of his time. In fact it was the room where the bed was, a bed that Guy had often spared little effort trying to break when they had lain in it together!

‘I am almost too frightened to go into the house now,’ she said, truthfully.

When the prior had listened to her story, he was greatly troubled, although for her sake he said: ‘Madam, do not fear. You shall be rescued from these things that you describe, because, as every cleric knows, God performs wonders and I am sure that he will inspire us to do the right thing. So do not distress yourself. Cheer up and try to remain in the house if you can. I will consult with my brother friars here, and among such educated and intelligent minds I am sure that a swift and expeditious means of proceeding can be found.’

And because there is no time like the present, the prior rang the chapter bell and gathered all the friars together. When they were all assembled, he explained to them the lady’s problem and asked them for their opinions. They listened carefully to the lady’s account and all agreed that the prior and two others should go quickly to the mayor of the city, explain to him the problem and ask, if he was willing, to let some of his men accompany them to the house to witness what was going on.

The woman was overcome with gratitude.



When the mayor heard about the haunted house, he gathered together a large number of men – as many as two hundred I believe it was – armed them and told them to go with the prior and do whatever he instructed them to do. And as the mayor instructed, so they did. The prior asked that the men make confession and hear Mass before they set out; he sang the Mass for all Christian Souls, then he prayed especially for Guy himself. Everyone was given an opportunity to receive the Eucharist so that the devil could not harm them. Then the prior very discreetly placed a Communion wafer in a small container and put it inside his habit, so that no one knew it was there.

The prior and his two brethren then went to Guy’s house. The two hundred armed men were stationed around the building and told to watch and to wait. Some stood by windows, others by doors, some in the garden, others on the roof. When they were all in position, the prior and his two friars entered the house.

‘May this house find peace!’ he shouted, in Latin. ‘Peace be to this house always!’

The prior went to the bedroom and sprinkled holy water whilst reciting, perceptively if not seasonally, the Easter Right of the Resurrection. ‘I have seen water!’ he cried. Then

he sang 'Come, Creator Spirit,' from the Mass of the Holy Spirit and continued to cast holy water about. Then he called the lady. She came forward, crying bitterly.

'Take me to the place where Guy died,' he said.

The woman looked terrified, she was shaking visibly, but nonetheless she took the prior to the bed where her husband had died. Her heart was as cold as stone but she found herself able to say: 'Sir, before you finish, will you say some prayers for Guy's soul, for he was a good man.'

'The Lord be with you,' answered the prior, and the other two echoed the sentiment.

Then the prior recited from the gospel of Saint John: 'In the beginning was the Word...' and when he was done, they sat down on a bench beside the bed and performed a service appropriate to the recently departed: seven psalms and the Litany pertaining to the Office of the Dead. They sang: 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world...' three times, and in response a small voice, a feeble voice that might have been that of a small child, was heard to say: 'Amen.'

The hair on the back of their necks stood on end.

'I require you, whatever you are, in the name of our most powerful Saviour, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who is and was and forever shall be, that you answer me and reply to the questions that I shall ask you to the fullest extent of your powers!' shouted the prior.

'Ask me whatever you wish,' came a reply, louder and stronger and more like that of a man than before. 'I will answer as far as I am able and as fully as the nature of my situation allows.'

The armed men outside heard this voice and came running in to see what was going on, fully expecting to see a ghost. But when they arrived, there was nothing to see. It was just a lone, disembodied voice.

'Are you an evil spirit or a good one?' asked the prior.

'I must be an evil spirit because of the things I did during my life and for which I shall suffer shortly.'

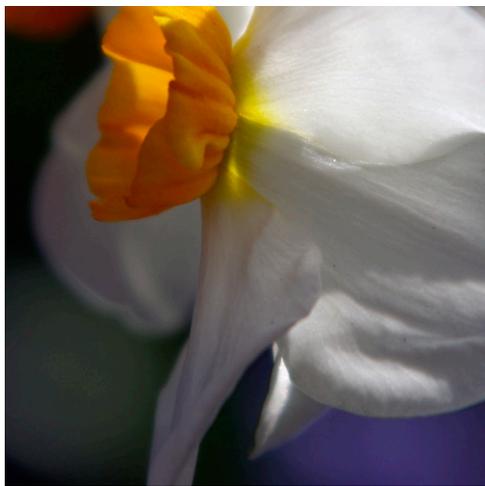
'You are not correct,' replied the prior, 'and let me tell you the reason why. I can quickly show you. You say you must be evil because of the punishment that you are about to suffer. I answer you by saying that all suffering is good, if it has been ordained appropriately, that is to say, in order to punish the sins for which due penance has not been paid here on Earth. It is given through God's will and therefore I say that it cannot be evil and if you are as you say you are, you would not think yourself a wicked spirit because of it.'

'Suffering is good,' replied the spirit, 'I grant you, because it is given by God through clear judgement and reason for the evil things that have been done. But nonetheless it is an evil to those who are forced to receive it! You may surely agree that I may be called

an evil spirit until such time as I am cleansed of the wicked things that I have done in my life.'

'So you say that you are evil,' replied the prior, 'but how can a man be evil after his death when he has led a good life and ended his days in the bosom of the Church and taken all his sacraments and been given the last rites and confessed all his sins and had them forgiven?'

'Men may be evil in two ways when they have died,' said the spirit. 'There are those who are evil and who are damned to spend an eternity in hell. And there are those who are evil for a limited time while they suffer their penance in a particular location, that is, until their sins have been washed clean. I am one of these, for I confessed and received absolution on Earth for my sins, but I am evil, that is for certain, and I will remain so until I have suffered the necessary punishment. For it is not enough to forgive



a man with words and sentiments but he must also complete the penance that is given to him, and any penance not completed when he dies must be completed in Purgatory.

'Tell me,' asked the prior, 'whose spirit are you. Who were you in life?'

'I was Guy, who lived here in this house.'

'But you cannot be!' exclaimed the prior. 'For you are causing great distress to your wife and have allowed a bad name to attach to Guy.'

'I assure you that I am who I say, I am' replied the voice. 'While I was in Guy's body I clothed myself in him, but that body has been an evil to us both. And for all the wickedness that Guy's body indulged in, I now suffer. Guy's body is now at rest and so it is I who have to take up the burden of suffering for these sins. And afterwards, when we enter Paradise, the joy that I have earned shall be his also. For then we shall be reunited again, body to soul. So therefore, since I suffer the pain of penance for him, we must be one and the same.

'And you say that I am giving Guy a bad name when my voice is, in fact, a help to him and a means of providing help to other souls who suffer in Purgatory. You can see this for yourself. Everybody in this city is flocking to Guy's house. Many are offering prayers to Guy, that he might be delivered from this anguish, as you and your brothers did just a short while ago. In their prayers they remember other souls as well, and those who pray shall receive absolution for their sins and so avoid punishment in the next life. Therefore I bring nothing discreditable to the name of Guy nor to his good wife but only benefit.'

'Then are you a good spirit or a bad one?' repeated the prior.

'I am a good spirit and not a bad one,' conceded the ghost. 'Scripture declares that when God had finished creating everything, he inspected it and saw that it was all good, and seeing that I am one of those things that He made, I must therefore be intrinsically good.'

The prior then asked the spirit if he knew, of those whom he had seen in Purgatory, who was saved and who was damned beyond redemption.

'All who find themselves in Purgatory are marked down to go eventually to heaven,' replied the voice. 'But none of them can know this for sure and caution prevents most from declaring their hopes too openly. Only someone who has been to both heaven and hell could tell you who is damned and who is saved, from the evidence of his own eyes. But since I am the spirit of Guy and suffer pain in Purgatory, I cannot see the souls in hell. I have never been there, and never shall be, I pray God. Neither can I see into heaven, until I am washed clean of all my sins. So I am afraid I cannot answer your question.'

'Then you are either ignorant or untruthful,' replied the prior. 'You are trying to deceive me with your lies and I can prove it to you in this way: in Holy Scripture it is clearly shown how the Old Testament prophets predicted the coming of Christ and yet none of them ever saw it with their own eyes! And I think that a good ghost, as the spirit of Guy ought to be, should have even more power to disclose these things than an Old Testament prophet.'

'Sir, your words are all hot air!' exclaimed the voice. 'It is not a true comparison that you make between the Old Testament prophets and souls in Purgatory. Whilst they were here on Earth, the prophets had direct contact with God and the angels and the spirit of the Holy Ghost to help them to predict the future. I, on the other hand, have been taken into torment for a certain length of time until God sees fit to deliver me into a better place. I can assure you that I can see no angels from where I am, except for the few who guard me, and they will tell me nothing until I have finished my penance. Therefore I cannot tell you who is in hell or who in Paradise.'

'It is written in books that fiends and devils have been able to reveal who is saved and who is damned,' said the prior.

'Not from Purgatory!' replied the ghost emphatically. 'And neither the devils in hell nor any man on Earth has the ability to know anything that goes on in heaven, unless it be through God's direct intervention or through communication with angels. And to me they have said nothing.'

'Then tell me,' said the prior. 'Where exactly are you?'

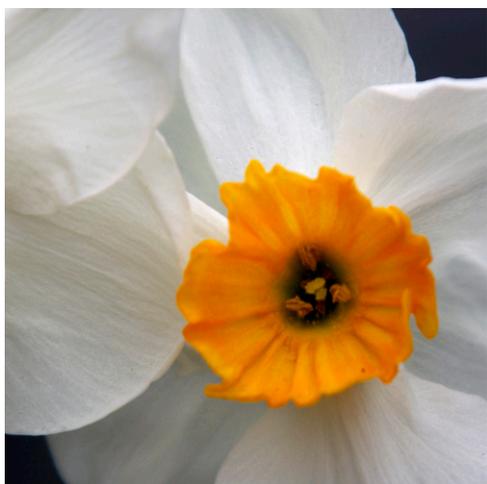
'I am here in Purgatory.'

'You are here in Purgatory. So if not in heaven or in hell, then here on Earth?'

'Purgatory lies in many different places,' replied the soul. 'One is common to all. Others

are specific to each individual.’

‘Now I know that you are trying to deceive me!’ exclaimed the prior. ‘No soul can be punished in two places at once! Whilst it is suffering in one, it cannot also be suffering in another as well!’



‘Listen!’ said the ghost. ‘I am here in my specific Purgatory each day, as God has ordained. But every night I suffer dreadfully in the Purgatory that is common to all, alongside all the other souls that are there.’

‘Then can you tell me this?’ asked the prior. ‘Where is common Purgatory? Where is this place of such anguish?’

‘In the middle of the Earth.’

‘You lie!’ retorted the prior. ‘And I can prove this by logical argument. There is a place in the middle of the Earth, but it is not Purgatory. And two places cannot exist in the same location at the same time, therefore Purgatory must lie somewhere else.’

‘The soul is composed of spirit,’ replied the ghost, ‘and therefore it does not occupy a material place. Matter and spirit can therefore coexist, just as sleet and snow can both exist in the same parcel of air.’

‘Tell us, then, why you are being punished here?’

‘Because this is the place where I committed the most grievous sin, and although I confessed it all I did no penance for it during my life. And so I receive my punishment for it here, until I am called to heaven.’

‘So tell me,’ asked the prior. ‘What frightens a man most when he dies?’

‘The sight of devils trying to seize him as one of their own,’ replied the spirit at once. ‘A long list of all his sins is brought before him, every single wickedness that he has ever committed, putting him into ever deeper despair and weakening his defences still further.’

‘Is there any help for a soul that has just died,’ asked the prior.

‘There are some who are beyond help,’ replied the voice. ‘If a man has lived a wicked life and refuses to confess any of his sins and feels no guilt for them, then his angel shall tell him how Christ suffered on the cross for him and will show him that the evil things he has done on Earth are against everything that is right and then he will allow the devils to set upon this soul and they will say: “Come with us, you miserable toad!” and they will throw him into hell, to remain there in pain and suffering for evermore. But if a man confesses all his sins and accepts absolution and receives all the sacraments, but

then if he dies soon afterwards without completing the penance that he has been given, his good angel will shout: "Go away, you devils, this man is nothing of yours! I know he has sinned, but he is redeemed because he has repented his misdeeds and has been given absolution for all his wickedness. And for this reason he shall be led into the cleansing fire! The goodness of Christ's crucifixion stands between you and him. Christ shall be his shield and his spear, He shall protect him from your arrows and defend him from your evil. Christ's image on the cross shall come between you and him. You have no power to harm him! Christ shall be his armour. The sins that he has committed shall be cleansed by the generous and outstretched hands of Christ. He shall feel no pain except that of Purgatory, which is transitory. He shall suffer there for a certain period of time, and when he is fully cleansed he shall come with us to live in joy for evermore."

'Christ's Passion is shown to us when we exit this Earthly world, in order to help us to fend off these devils. And if a man has been absolved of all his sins, as I have said before, he should fear nothing, but seek the intercession of the Virgin Mary who will say to these devils: "I am both a virgin and a mother; mother of Jesus Christ who is God Almighty, and the Queen of Heaven, and also the Duchess of Earth and the Empress of Hell, where you all live. And as Queen of Heaven I shall say to my Son: 'Allow this man, for my love, to go to Purgatory and remain there until he is cleansed of all his sins, and let him at last achieve Heavenly Bliss.' And as Duchess of Earth I ordain with the consent of my Son that every ritual and every prayer that is said on Earth shall be to his profit. All the Masses and all the charitable acts that are performed will speed this man towards his heavenly reward, and by those deeds and by those church services the suffering that has accrued to him because of your evil temptations shall be made easier for him to bear. And in my capacity as Empress of Hell, I command you to go away and leave this man alone."

'And in this way a man's soul shall be saved. His good angel will take him to Purgatory to continue his penance and shall guard over him until he has suffered all that he has to suffer. And the wicked fiends shall be dispersed in disappointment and discomfort, for every prayer, every act of charity and every Mass sung here on Earth can help a man when he has died, and bring him into the cleansing fire.'

'Can a man then see Jesus Christ and Mary, His mother, when he has just died?' asked the prior, incredulously.

'No. A sinful man cannot.'

'Then you are making a complete fool of yourself!' exclaimed the prior. 'You have contradicted yourself. You told us that Christ's crucifixion is brought before our eyes and Mary the mother of Jesus and all the saints as well, when we die. So every soul should be able to see them, should it not?'

'No!' replied the spirit. 'The soul will not see them in their true likeness. The greatest joy of heaven is to see Christ in his true likeness! If men were rewarded with a vision of the true Godhead immediately they died, then heaven would be attained at once and that

is not how it is.’

‘You mention suffrage,’ said the prior. ‘Are departed souls able to know what prayers are being said for them here on Earth, or what charitable things are being done on their behalf?’

‘Oh yes,’ said the voice.

‘Then tell me what Mass I sang for you just now.’

‘You sang a Mass of the Holy Spirit.’

‘No I didn’t!’ exclaimed the prior. ‘I sang the Requiem for all Christian Souls that are in Pain.’

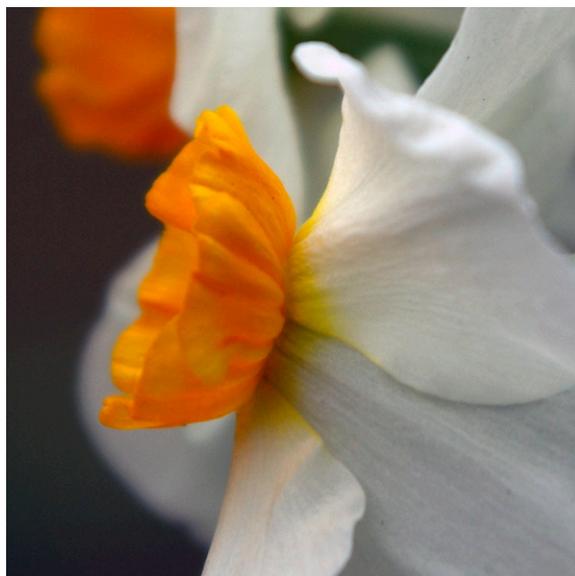
You sang the Requiem, but it is a Mass of the Holy Spirit. Therefore I said that you sang a Mass of the Holy Spirit, and I am right.’

‘So how many souls can an individual priest sing for in any one day?’ asked the prior.

‘A priest can sing for all souls in a day and each will receive benefit by virtue of the Sacrament. Jesus Christ was crucified only once on the cross for the salvation of all mankind. The priest, during Mass, presents the risen Christ and therefore a Mass can benefit all Christian souls.’

‘Holy Scripture tells us that an individual soul can be released from torment by prayers said by friends here on Earth,’ said the prior. ‘And by acts of charity done in their name.’

‘Some souls can receive more help than others,’ replied the ghost. ‘A living friend has alleviated my own suffering: I have a cousin whom you know well. I helped to support him when he was studying and continued to do so afterwards for five years, when he was a friar. And I never did myself a better turn! He has not forgotten my kindness towards him and now keeps me in his thoughts always, which



is to my great advantage. I was due to suffer here in Purgatory for four years but now I have only from now until Easter to endure. And if you wish to have this confirmed, come here again at Easter and if there is no sign of me, you will know that I have been taken up into heaven.’

‘Into heaven with the saints?’

‘I have no idea who else will be there!’ replied the spirit. ‘But I am assured of heavenly joy. My angel has told me that I shall remain in torment until Easter and then I shall see the King of Heaven in all his Glory.’

‘What most helps a soul to lessen the time that it has to spend in Purgatory?’ asked the prior.

‘Church services conducted by the clergy.’

Which Masses, then, may especially help a soul to speed through Purgatory?’

‘The Mass of the Virgin Mary and the Seven Psalms with the Litany,’ replied the spirit at once.

‘That can’t be right!’ exclaimed the prior. ‘God has decreed that the Our Father is our most important prayer.’

‘Sir, the Seven Psalms are most beneficial to souls who are in torment because each deals in turn with one of the seven sins and helps to draw it away from the sinner. Of benefit also is the Placebo which contains five psalms that shall only be sung at evensong, along with five hymns, and the ten together are designed to restore to the attentive soul the Ten Commandments. And the nine psalms of the Dirige signify the nine orders of angels of which the soul shall be a part when he is purged of all his sin. The Laudes, also, contain five hymns that help a soul to gain strength; for when this world began, God conferred five strengths upon a man’s soul to make it like His. Man mirrors the Holy Trinity in strength of thought, in strength of understanding and in strength of will. But through thoughtlessness and misunderstanding he is like an animal. And because of this the soul resides in the body like a stone and feels itself one with it when it is, in fact, one with the angels. And also the psalm of Benedictus and the Magnificat help to save souls from harm and allows them the certainty of knowing that, after their allotted period of suffering, they will be permitted to go to heaven and to Everlasting Joy. Sir Prior, these prayers help souls more than the Office of the Dead and the Requiem. But I shall have to leave you!’ exclaimed the ghost suddenly. ‘I must suffer torment in another place!’ And he began to moan.

‘Is there anything we can do to help you?’ asked the prior.

‘If you will say for me five times the Five Joys of Our Lady,’ the spirit replied, ‘that might help.’

The prior and his two friars were delighted to grant this, so they knelt down upon their knees and said with devotion: ‘Rejoice, virgin mother of Christ...’ all five verses, and repeated them another four times.

‘You have comforted me greatly!’ said the ghost when they had finished. ‘My pain is much less and I am able to speak with you a little longer now.’ And he thanked them.

‘Can you tell us, then, what most harms the fiends of hell?’ asked the prior.

‘The sacrament of the Body of Christ,’ replied the ghost.

‘Can all spirits see the communion wafer when it is placed upon the altar,’ asked the prior.

‘Spirits are aware of it more keenly than any man.’

‘Can devils do it any harm or disturb it in any way?’ asked the prior.

‘No,’ replied the voice. ‘Not unless the priest is in deadly sin.’

‘But is there no angel set to guard over the altar as the miracle of the Eucharist is taking place?’

‘Yes, there is,’ replied the spirit. ‘And were it not for these good angels, the evil spirits might disturb the priest so that he would have no power to create Christ’s Body. But if the priest who stands in God’s presence has a clean conscience and prays with sincerity and conviction, then the devils can do him no harm.’

‘But is there no prayer that you know,’ asked the prior, ‘that a priest can say before he begins Mass that might prevent any possibility of this happening!’

‘If the priest knows the prayer called the prayer of Saint Ambrose, and if he says it every day before beginning Mass, there is scarcely anything in the world that can harm him!’

‘Have you seen the Body of Christ since you died?’ asked the prior.

‘Yes, I see it now, for it is beneath your robes in the box that you picked up from the altar.’

All the people in the room froze and stared, because they had no idea that the prior had concealed a consecrated host about his person and most believed that it could only happen during Mass - a wafer becoming Christ’s Body.

‘Then I would like to know why you are not honouring it,’ said the prior.

‘I have honoured it in the way that spirits may, with all my thought and with all my strength, since you first entered the room.’

The prior then took out the blessed Sacrament and said to the spirit: ‘If you truly believe that this is Christ’s Body then I invite you to come with me to the front door!’

‘I will gladly follow my Lord whom you hold between your hands.’

The prior quickly made his way towards the front door, followed by the two friars and many others. He could see nothing of the ghost but fancied that he could hear a sound rather like the sweeping of a broom across a pavement. The sound followed him.

‘Spirit!’ shouted the prior. ‘I command you to show yourself!’

There was only silence.

The prior walked back to where the lady, Guy’s widow, was lying on her bed as though she could take no more. The sound of a broom sweeping across a floor accompanied them to her bedside where she had begun to grind her teeth, exposing her gums and crying out as though she was mad. All those witnessing this were astonished. Everybody

who could do so, squeezed into the room to get a better sight of her. But now she lay perfectly still, as though she had died. The prior began to regret that he had ever come into the house.

‘By the Passion of Christ!’ he exclaimed into the air. ‘Can you tell me why your wife is in this state?’

‘She can tell you as well as I,’ returned the disembodied voice.

The prior turned in a kindly way to the lady who lay on the bed and said: ‘In the name of God, madam, please tell me what is going on.’

She said nothing. But after a while, she rose from the bed and sank to her knees. ‘Lord Jesus,’ she whispered. ‘As you saved me from eternal damnation through your suffering, have pity and help me now!’

‘Why is your wife in such distress?’ asked the prior into the air once more.



‘She knows as well as I,’ said the voice. ‘And if you want to learn the reason, I suggest that you ask her.’

The prior turned to the widow and said more forcefully: ‘Madam, tell me what it is that is causing you all this grief. I may be able to help.’

She lay down once more upon the bed, and said nothing. The prior was at a loss. ‘Spirit, or whatever you are, tell me, by the power and the might of God Almighty, by all the saints in heaven, by the tears that Mary shed at the death of Jesus, by the sweet milk of Mary mother of Christ! What is going on!’

‘We performed an unnatural sexual act together in this house for which she was frankly to blame. But we never completed our penance and so therefore we must continue with our suffering until our penance is complete.’

‘What was it?’ asked the prior.

‘Tell me what it was, so that married men may be warned!’

‘God will not permit me to divulge such information,’ replied the voice. ‘The sin is confessed. We both received absolution. It is forgiven. But we must pay our dues in penance.’

The lady still lay weeping on the bed, and sorrowfully, she suddenly exclaimed: ‘Guy, for my love, tell me whether I shall be saved or damned! Will I spend eternity in pain and

damnation for the sin which we committed together!’

‘Have no fear of eternal damnation,’ replied the spirit. ‘You shall be saved.’

The woman’s spirits lifted immediately and she fell to her knees in thanks, repeating an Our Father and a Hail Mary. She loved God with all her heart and repeated the words sincerely.

‘I must ask,’ said the prior into the air, ‘why you did not manifest yourself directly to us friars in the first place, to men of religion I mean, rather than to your wife, since you know that we are much nearer to God than any woman is and could advise you with much greater wisdom?’

‘I did so because I love my wife more than I love you,’ replied the spirit. ‘And when it was judged that I should suffer my particular Purgatorial penance in this bedroom, I asked God if I might try to warn my wife about the sin that we had committed, and he permitted me to manifest myself to her in this room, so that her suffering in Purgatory might ultimately be lessened by completing her penance for it here on Earth.’

‘Can you tell me how long you are to suffer in Purgatory?’

‘Until Easter, as I have already told you,’ replied the ghost. ‘Then my pain will be over and I shall go to heaven.’

‘It amazes me,’ said the prior, ‘that you are able to speak, and yet you have no tongue nor anything else that is normally required for speech.’

‘The body is but an instrument of the soul,’ answered the spirit, ‘and the soul possesses all kinds of virtues, strengths and intelligences. Such things are given to it through its very nature, and words can originate from it without any need for the intermediation of a body. A man needs a mouth and a tongue to speak the things that his mind conceives, but God and the angels are able to speak wisely to men although they have neither mouth nor tongue, as Scripture tells us; and in the same way, I and every other spirit can create a perfect voice, form words and deliver them, without a tongue.’

‘Where does a soul exist immediately after death?’ asked the prior.

‘At the moment of a man’s death his entire life flashes before his eyes,’ replied the voice. ‘Both the things he is proud of and the things of which he should be ashamed. Then afterwards, he discovers whether he shall be sent by judgement to the common Purgatory, to a temporary place set aside for him alone, or straight into the pains of everlasting damnation or even straight into the joy of heaven, as I have explained to you already.’

‘Then how quickly does a soul arrive at Purgatory or heaven or hell after dying?’ asked the prior.

‘It takes just a few moments,’ replied the voice. ‘When the sun rises in the morning the light spreads quickly over all the world, and in the same way, when men die their souls very soon find themselves in their appointed place. They go quickly to heaven or to hell,

or if they are destined for Purgatory they are forced to linger there for a period of time that may change with circumstances, but it is all to their good, for if they have any faithful friends remaining here on Earth, and if Masses are sung for them and prayers said or acts of charity performed in their name, then the soul may hover in the air until it has received the benefit of all this. Through friends' goodness and generosity a soul's suffering may be lessened, and deeds that are done quickly help a soul the most, as has happened, in fact, this very day. A friar only a few hours ago was taken down to the common Purgatory; but just before expiring he had asked all his brother friars to say the proper prayers for him and to perform charitable acts on his behalf, and especially all the observances regarding Our Lady. And they quickly did as he asked. And when he was dead, his angel prepared to take him to the common Purgatory for three months to suffer for his sins. But Our Lady Mary went and asked her Son if his soul might remain in the air until it had received all the benefit of the things being said and done for it here. So for two hours it hovered in the air, and such mercy he has had from God, through His mother Mary, and through the acts of charity and the Masses performed here on Earth, that he shall soon be in Heavenly Joy! He has only to spend from now until tomorrow morning in pain!

'Which things are the most efficacious, in this regard?' asked the prior.

'Works of perfect charity, performed in God's name and to our fellow Christians.'

'Then tell me quickly,' asked the prior, 'what sort of people are they mostly like, who suffer torment in Purgatory?'

'Every soul that shall eventually be saved is punished there. And Sir,' replied the ghost, 'no living person yet knows whether his life shall be applauded or vilified, whether he shall be loved or hated by God, until he is judged. Only then will he know for certain whether joy or pain is his destiny.'

'I must ask you,' said the prior. 'Who, of all those whom we inter into the ground, most approaches perfection?'

'In every person there is something to admire and something to frown upon. And if I may guess the thrust of your question, I cannot say which way of life is the most praiseworthy, or which monastic order the most virtuous.'

'Does God show any mercy to those in Purgatory?' asked the prior.

'Yes, certainly! He reprieves many a portion of their suffering, some by a quarter, some a third and others by as much as a half. And this is all because of the prayers said for them by friends here on Earth. And if any acts of charity are done in their name, they can obtain a speedy release!'

'I must know this,' said the prior urgently. 'What kind of pain do you suffer yourself, in Purgatory?'

'I must stand in a hot flame with nothing to cool me.'

‘Now I know that you are being untruthful with me!’ replied the prior. ‘I shall prove it to you. Mark this, if you will. A flame belongs to the physical world. You, on the other hand, are a spirit and so, by the laws of Nature, which God will not contravene, you cannot be harmed by anything material. Therefore fire cannot harm you.’

‘You are wrong to call me a liar, as I have proved to you numerous times already,’ replied the ghost. ‘You are aware, I am sure, that the devils in hell will spend the rest of eternity in its fires, and that these fires are as corporeal as the fires of Purgatory. And yet it hurts those devils to be amongst them, as Christ has explained in his gospels, and as he will tell the damned on Doomsday. And if you say that God will not openly contravene the laws of Nature, I say that He will and He does, in miracles. Remember the three children who were condemned by Nebuchadnezzar to be thrown into a fire, for example. By the will of Our Lord the flames did them no harm and they sat in the middle of the hearth and sang His praises. In the same way, God has ordained that the fire cannot consume me when I stand in it, but that it will hurt me a great deal nonetheless.’

‘Why is this fire not catching the house alight at this very moment, then?’ asked the prior.

‘Now you are showing your ignorance!’ replied the ghost. ‘Didn’t I tell you a moment ago that God can withdraw the heat from fire whenever he wishes. Saint Elmo’s Fire is a natural phenomenon that can wrap itself around things during an electrical storm at sea, but it does not burn them – you can put your hand into it! Beams of harsh sunlight pass through glass windows and the glass is not impaired in any way, and I can come and go and leave unscathed the clothes and furniture and buildings of my surroundings although I may be engulfed in flames. This house can receive my presence without any danger, although the heat that I suffer is intense!’

‘Do you believe that God took on a man’s flesh and blood in the body of Jesus Christ?’

‘Ah! My prior!’ replied the ghost. ‘Are there any who disbelieve it? Fiends in hell are aware of it! Souls in Purgatory experience it at first hand. Is it not written in the gospels: “Whoever truly believes and is baptized shall be brought to Everlasting Bliss.” And also: “The man who refuses to believe that Christ walked upon Earth shall be damned to suffer in hell without hope of the slightest happiness, for evermore.”

‘Then tell me this,’ said the prior. ‘Since neither the Muslims nor the Jews nor any other



pagans believe this to be true, why does God suffer them to remain on Earth if what they believe is wrong and they refuse to believe the truth?’

‘Don’t ask me why God chooses to act as he does. Strive only to conform to His teachings and His commandments in your own life. I don’t know why they are allowed to live, unless it be that Christian men may defend their faith by making war against them and so increase their own reward in heaven.

‘Tell me this, then,’ said the prior. ‘Which of the world’s sins are the most prevalent today?’

‘Ambition, taking pleasure in sex, charging interest on money loaned and hankering after wealth. These are the four. These, along with all the other things that grow from them, are the sins that disgust God and His angels the most. And there are three sins particularly that God will punish severely: one is if a man and a woman live together as though they are married when they are not, or if someone leaves their spouse to live with someone else; this is a great sin before God. Another sin I cannot even bring myself to speak of, but churchmen will know what I refer to! And the third sin is murder and denial, which is just as hateful.’

‘Can you tell me, then: when will the Antichrist arise and how will this terrible happening come about?’

‘I cannot tell you those things which are private to God himself, and there is no point in you asking me anything that has to do with God’s intentions.’

‘You hear me clearly then?’

‘I certainly do.’

‘But if you have ears to hear me with then you must have a body as well, and cannot be the spiritual being you have tried to convince me that you are.’

‘The spirit is able to hear.’

At this point Guy’s wife interrupted them: ‘For the love of Christ, stop!’ she implored, and asked the prior to try to persuade Guy’s ghost to stop haunting her.

‘I command you in the name of the One God,’ cried the prior, ‘and by all His saints. Leave this woman in peace!’

‘Only if she promises to live in chastity as a widow and only if she arranges for three hundred Masses to be sung for me,’ replied the ghost.

The woman immediately said: ‘Yes! Yes! Yes!’ to this and went to all the friars in the town, to every priest and to every monastery, and every abbey, and arranged for three hundred Masses to be sung for the benefit of her husband in a single day. And when this was all done and the Masses had been performed, Guy’s ghost was heard no more.

On this point, it must be said that the prior returned to the house at Easter, as the ghost

had invited him to, and finding no sign of him, concluded that Guy had been correct when he had said that he would be taken into heaven at this time, and he believed that this gave weight to everything else that the ghost had told him.

But by now the day had grown late, it was around evensong and the prior instructed every man, in the name of God, to go back to the place where he was supposed to be. 'And wherever you go in the days and months ahead,' he said 'recount exactly what happened and repeat exactly what you heard.' Then the prior turned to Guy's wife and cautioned her to keep the promise that she had made to her husband about not messing around with any men. And he advised that a priest should sing prayers for Guy's soul every day in the house, from now until Easter.

The wife happily did as the prior advised her and obtained a priest, but she would go nowhere near the house herself, she was so frightened of it now. And on the twelfth day of Christmas, she went back to see the prior who had helped her and he arranged to visit her house once again to see if the ghost would put in another appearance. He took with him some Augustinian monks, some Franciscan friars and other clergy, more than twenty in all I believe, and together they went to the woman's house and conducted a service for Guy's soul. When the prayers were nearly done, during the *Requiescant in Pace*, they heard a voice, just as before – it sounded like a brush sweeping a pavement.

'I call upon you to stay and answer our questions,' shouted the prior.

The voice replied weakly, as though it was not very well: 'Why do you disturb me? It's less than a fortnight ago that I answered everything that you asked me. What more do you want?'

One of the friars, a very learned man, spoke up: 'Tell us all whether you have completed your penance or what it is that you are suffering at this very moment.'

The voice answered: 'Thanks be to God's mercy, such grace has been shown to me through Masses said for me that I am relieved of the suffering in Common Purgatory, where I was before. I will not have to return there ever again!'

'Then tell us what penance you have here, since you have passed through Purgatory,' said the friar.

'I suffer in hot flames.'

'Is there anything we can do to help you?'

'No. I must remain until my suffering has completed its allotted time.'

'I have gathered together witnesses to the things that you will say, so that we can communicate them to the Pope,' cried the prior. 'Tell us something that will prove to the world that we have spoken with you.'

'I will tell you this,' replied the ghost. 'Unless you teach the people better than you've been doing in the past, you'll all be damned! Preach against the sin of simony, the sell-

ing of positions in the Church and the incomes that attach to them, for money. Preach against the lending of cash in order to earn interest, killing and denial, adultery and perjury. All of these sins, I warn you, will attract the vengeance of God unless people renounce them. And you'll not be exempt from harsh punishment yourselves, unless you teach the people properly, for a sinful life is now more commonly followed than one according to Christ's teaching.'

Then the prior asked how many Popes there would be between then and Doomsday.

'I cannot see into the future so you cannot learn anything like that from me.'

Then the ghost fell silent. And nothing more was ever heard from him again. Everyone who had been present went away and came at last before Pope John XXII in Avignon to tell him of these events. And when Easter came around, the Pope sent emissaries to investigate the story for himself and these men spent a lot of time in the house where the ghost had appeared only a few months earlier, but there was no sign of him now. And from this, men assumed that he had been taken into heaven, as he had said that he would, where there is comfort without pain. May Christ protect us, through the prayers of His mother. Amen.