

All Souls Day November 02, 2017

Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:12-26; Mark 8:27-35

Today is the feast of All-Souls, when we commemorate all those who have gone before us for their eternal reward, those who have died, marked with the sign of faith. We already commemorate the dead at every single Mass, as part of the Eucharistic Prayer, and we will hear these words again today. We recognize that they are part of the mystical body in the church. But today we reflect in a special way, not so much on the dead, but those waiting for their reward at this moment. The topic may sound morbid, but in fact it contains a secret to tremendous joy. Unless Jesus happens to return in glory first, we will all have to face death, whether our own or that of some close to us. And our faith has a direct impact on how we face this ultimate moment. The celebration of All Souls ' Day is based on the theological basis that some of those who have departed from this world, have not been perfectly cleansed from venial sin, or have not fully atoned for their past transgression. As such, being temporary deprived of the beatified vision until such time as they have been completely sanctified in Christ; these departed souls are to remain in Purgatory. To assist them so that they may be freed from Purgatory, we, their spiritual brothers and sisters can help the Faithful Departed who are also members of the Body of Christ, through our prayers, our pious deeds and most important of all, through the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. The Scripture readings for today give rich matter for reflection and touch on the reality of death in general, something we will all have to face some day and for which we should be ready. After all, the Lord will come quietly, like a thief in the night. In Jesus we have the hope of resurrection that we will be united with him. Today, the Church asks us to remember the faithful departed. In obedience, we do so, praying that when we have departed from this world, and most important of all, have Holy Masses celebrated on our behalf so we may quickly be assured the eternal beatified vision of God.

The Catholic teaching on Purgatory essentially seen in our belief in two realities: First, that there will be a purification of believers prior to entering heaven and Second that the prayers and masses of the faithful are sure to benefit those in the state of purification. As to the duration, place and exact nature of this purification, the Church has no official dogma, although Saint Augustine and others used fire as a way to explain the nature of the purification. Many faithful Catholics, including Pope Benedict XVI, grant that Purgatory may be best thought of as an existential state, as opposed to a temporal place. In other words, because

Purgatory is outside the confines of created time and space, it is not necessarily accurate to speak of a location or duration of Purgatory. Nonetheless, the prayers and Masses of the faithful do have an impact on the purification that the faithful are undergoing in Purgatory. Some spiritual writers in the past described "Purgatory" in vivid details. Yet the official teaching of the Church is very circumspect and, beyond speaking of some sort of purifying process, does not speculate as to its nature. It is not helpful then to think of "Purgatory" as a place, but to see it as a process of purification, where in the benevolent God responds to the prayers of many to receive all his beloved children into his heavenly banquet.

From the early days, Christians have prayed for the dead and have undertaken works of penance and mercy on their behalf. There is scriptural basis for this intercessory prayer for the sins of others and for the dead in the Old Testament. Job's sacrifices purified his sons. Judas Maccabeus made atonement for the dead that they are delivered from their sins. The tradition in the Church of having Masses said for the dead began in the earliest times. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead. The pre-Christian Roman religion, which held that some form of life continued after death, gave votive offerings to the gods on behalf of the dead at three specified times: the third, seventh and thirtieth day after death. This practice of praying for the departed on these same days was adopted by the early Christians and this practice continued in the Church. The Church offered Masses for the deceased person on the third, seventh and thirtieth day after the death of the baptized person.

The Church prays for the faithful departed throughout the entire year during mass. However, All Souls Day is the general, solemn day of commemoration, when the Church remembers, prays for and offers requiem masses for the faithful departed, now in their state of purification. Typically Christians will reserve this day to offer prayers on behalf of their departed relatives and friends. Tradition tells us that Christians have always been praying for their departed brothers and sisters to remain in communion with them. Early liturgies and inscriptions on catacomb walls attest to the ancientness of prayers for the dead, even if the Church needed more time to develop a substantial theology behind this practice. Praying for the dead is actually borrowed from Judaism, as indicated in the second book of Maccabees. In the New Testament, St Paul prays for his departed friend Onesiphorus to receive divine mercy as we read in second Timothy. Early Christian writers Tertullian and St. Cyprian testify to the regular practice of

praying for the souls of the departed. Tertullian justified the practice based on custom and Tradition, and not on explicit scriptural teaching. The Christians always believed that their prayers could somehow have a positive effect on the souls of departed believers.

In the early days, departed Christians' names were written on special parchments to remind people to pray for them. In the sixth century, Benedictine communities held commemorations for the departed on the feast of Pentecost. All Souls' Day became a universal festival largely on account of the influence of Odilo of Cluny in AD 998, when he commanded its annual celebration in the Benedictine houses of his congregation. This practice soon spread to the Carthusian congregations as well. The praying for the departed was celebrated on different days, as it was October 15th in 12th century Milan. Today all Western Catholics celebrate All Souls' Day on November 2, as do many Anglicans and Lutherans. Initially many Protestant reformers rejected All Souls' Day because of the lack of theology behind it but it is now celebrated in many Protestant communities, in some cases with the Catholic theology of Purgatory. The Eastern Churches lack a clearly defined doctrine of Purgatory, yet they regularly pray for the departed.

On this day we remember and pray for all our dear departed members. Death is painful and can awaken feelings that are powerful, changing and compelling. The experience of death hurts us as it invites the person to imagine the afterlife, the longing to be with the divine and to enter into a new experience. On this day we are faced with the mystery of death and we are reminded of the promise of resurrection and eternal life. Today's liturgy emphasizes the paschal character of Christian death and places in relief the resurrection of Christ as the hope of our own resurrection and new life. St Paul assures us, as he instructs the Thessalonian converts that we believe Jesus died and rose again and likewise our dear ones also will rise. We believe that God will bring with Jesus all people to himself, persons who have died believing in him. When a person dies and the body is buried it is mortal. But when raised from the dead it will be immortal, a spiritual body. Our respect for the dead specifies our respect for all human life which comes from God. The feast of All Souls is a reminder that they are members of the Communion of Saints, have been saved and will one day be in heaven. However, they need to be perfected before they can go to heaven that is cleansed of all blemishes, they come into full unity with the perfection that is God.

The Scripture readings of today provide rich matter for reflection and touch on the reality of death in general, something we will all have to face one day and for

which we ought to be ready. The Scriptures tell us that the Lord will come quietly at an unexpected moment "like a thief in the night". We do not want to have the door closed in our face and hear those terrible words: "I do not know you." The Scripture constantly warns us to be ready to meet our Lord at any time. The readings of today also acknowledge the complexities of life. Sometimes, when we experience the loss, we feel the absence of peace. Then we are confused and overwhelmed. We await God's mercy and his compassionate love. The gospel of John tells us of the glorification of Jesus and that when he is raised up he will draw all people to himself. The word draw is a special word that involves a sense of attraction and it is Jesus who will take us all to himself. In the Gospel of Mark we have the confession of Peter who professes that Jesus is the Son of God and Jesus in response tells the disciples that he will suffer and die and will be raised from the dead. The First Letter to the Corinthians renews that confidence. Our resurrection is as certain as that of Christ himself. If Christ is not raised, then "our faith has been in vain" and then what happened on Calvary was the end of everything. Without resurrection Jesus would have moved into nothingness and, for all of us, life would have had no meaning.

In his Homily on the All Souls Day, Pope Benedict XVI said that our souls turn again to these last things as we commemorate all the faithful departed, those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith and sleep in peace. It is very important for us Christians to live our relationship with the dead in the truth of faith, and to look at death and the afterlife in the light of Revelation. On All Souls' Day, we ask God for mercy on those who have died. We pray for an ever deeper and abiding awareness of the steadfast love of God expressed through Jesus Christ. God's love made known in Jesus Christ is the reason for our hope. Today is a day of solidarity between all Christians. It is a celebration of what we call the "Communion of Saints", where 'saints' signifies all who are baptized in Christ. Our love and sense of duty do not permit us to ignore them. They are all our people some of whom are intimately known to us. They call out to our help and one day we too will need help from others.

There are many customs associated with All Souls Day, and these vary greatly from culture to culture. In Mexico they celebrate All Souls Day as "the day of the dead." Customs include going to a graveyard to have a picnic, eating skull-shaped candy, and leaving food out for dead relatives. The practice of leaving food out for dead relatives is interesting, but it is not exactly Catholic Theology. In the Philippines they celebrate "Memorial Day" based loosely on All Souls Day.

Customs include praying novenas for the holy souls, and ornately decorating relatives' graves. On the eve of All Souls (i.e. the evening of All Saints Day), partiers go door-to-door, requesting gifts and singing a traditional verse representing the liberation of holy souls from purgatory. In Hungary the day is known as "the day of the dead," and a common custom is inviting orphans into the family and giving them food, clothes, and toys. In rural Poland, a legend developed that at midnight on All Souls Day a great light shone on the local parish. This light was said to be the holy souls of departed parishioners gathered to pray for their release from Purgatory at the altars of their former earthly parishes. After this, the souls were said to return to scenes from their earthly life and work, visiting homes and other places. As a sign of welcome, Poles leave their windows and doors ajar on the night of All Souls Day. In India special type of eats are prepared particularly in honour of the dead. Visiting the graves of the beloved persons and decorating graves with flowers is well practiced custom. All of these customs show the wide variety of traditions related to All Souls Day.

On this day the Church is asking of us to pray in a very special way for all the deceased, for all those whom we knew, but also for all those who have died without their going away ever being communicated to us. We know only a minute part of this multitude of people who died since the creation of the world, but God on the other hand, knows them all and each person in their individuality. God knows all things: he knows what we are doing now because he watches us, he listens to us. He waits for us to turn to him with the simplicity of a child who confides in his Father full of love and tenderness. Today Jesus repeats the same words for us: "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out." So, when the Father gives to his Son all people who are called to go towards Christ, it is first and foremost this other fact which is accomplished: the Gift of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus says is that the Father gives his Son completely the Holy Spirit and every person therefore who is called by God goes toward the Saviour of the world for the eternal reward.

Today, when we are commemorating all the faithful departed we turn towards Heaven and towards the eternity. We go to the God of Love, the all holy, all powerful and to him we direct our prayers for the souls of all those who died, our brothers and sisters waiting to be one in Jesus. We must remember that the saints are not people who are free from human imperfections. Rather they are those who are outstandingly good in spite of and through their shortcomings. Every saint is also a sinner and it is a sign of sainthood that one is always aware of

that. Let us ask Mary, who saw her Son on earth, and who sees him constantly in Heaven, to grant us this grace of eternal life. We pray to Mary our Mother that through her intercession all Christians receive the eternal life which is in her Son, and may the souls of all the departed rest in eternal peace through her intercession. At the same time we are aware of our future destiny with God that depends to a large extent on how seriously we have taken the words of Jesus to our hearts that he is our resurrection and life.

On All Souls' Day, we ask God for mercy on those who have died. We pray for an ever deeper and abiding awareness of the steadfast love of God expressed through Jesus Christ. God's love made known in Jesus Christ is the reason for our hope. Today is a day of solidarity between all Christians. It is a celebration of what we call the "Communion of Saints", where 'saints' signifies all persons baptized in Christ. Our love and sense of duty do not permit us to ignore them. They are all our people some of whom are intimately known to us. They call out to our help and one day we too will need help from others. Let us, then, make the prayer of today's Mass our own: "God, our creator and redeemer, by your power Christ conquered death and returned to you in glory. May all your people who have gone before us in faith share his victory and enjoy the vision of your glory forever." Amen.

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