

Sunday 31 The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls Day)

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Expressing His Love It is only a few months since your husband or wife died, or perhaps your parents who lived with you, or maybe it was your child. You get up from the sofa in the living room to go to the kitchen, and for a split second you think you see him or her. Then you remember, "No, Mom passed away two months ago." Or you go to Grandpa and Grandma's house. Only Grandma is not there; she passed away recently. But in an unguarded moment, in the blink of an eye, with a quick glance, you think you see her there. These are common occurrences. Certain places or events can trigger our memory in such a powerful way that the person we remember seems present. Now, some people will say, "Mom's gone." or "She's just a memory, but she isn't here any more," and do their best to move on with life. We Christians do more than that, though. Much more. For us Christians the everyday event of sensing the presence of our departed loved ones reminds us of a wonderful reality: our loved ones still live.

The flashback to their presence in our lives often leads us to say a prayer for them. Perhaps we might say, "May she rest in peace, united to the Lord forever in the peace of Christ." Why do we pray for our deceased loved ones? Why do we have this celebration today, the Commemoration of All Souls? Why do we dedicate the month of November to praying for the dead? Why do we have funeral Masses? We do all these things because we believe in the power of prayer. We believe that our continual entreaty to God to bring our loved ones to peace will prepare them to bear the fullness of His Love in heaven. We pray because we believe in love. We believe that true love, the love that flows from God and returns to Him, true love remains forever.

We sincerely loved the members of our family, our friends and all who have died. And we still love them. This love which is looking for nothing other than to express itself is sacrificial love. It is loving as Jesus loved. We are not expecting anything in return. We just want to express our love others. We do this through prayer.

And God hears our prayers and sees the love motivated by those who have died. Some of these loved ones are fully united to Him now. They are the saints, be they canonized by the Church, babies and little children, or older children, Teens and adults all who died with lives so pure, so sincere, that they are ready to endure the blaze of His Love. Some of our loved ones are not ready to enter into His Presence. The results of their sins is still affecting them. Just like an arm broken many years ago still hurts when the weather changes, the deceased who is forgiven his or her sins still suffers the result of the sin.

But God's love is motivated by the love this person inspired in others, seen in their constant prayer. These prayers lead Him to heal the results of sin, or as we say in the terminology of the Church, to free them from Purgatory. This was presented beautifully and succinctly by Dante Alighieri in the second book of the Divine Comedy, The Purgatorio. There he presents the souls in purgatory as holding themselves back from climbing the mountain of God until they are able to accept the fulness of His Love. They are dependent on the prayers of their loved ones still on earth to prepare them to receive the fire of God's love.

The power of prayer is far greater, infinitely greater than we could ever imagine. Often when we pray we call on the strength of the Almighty One to perform an action beyond our capabilities, but not beyond His. Today we pray that the Lord heals the wounds of all who are not yet ready to enter into the fulness of His presence. May they be healed. May any part of their lives that have been closed to Love be completely open to the Presence of God. So we pray today for our deceased parents, spouses, children, relatives, and friends. We know that they were good people. But we also know that they were people.

We want them to be capable of receiving the full blast of God's love; so we pray for them. We celebrate funeral Masses, for that is the prayer of Jesus on the Cross for the deceased, the greatest prayer we could offer. We have additional Masses said for our loved ones throughout the year. We remember them in our daily prayers. And we pray for them particularly on today, All Souls Day, and throughout the month of November. We are all united in the Community of the Church.

We are united to the saints in their triumph. We are united with the souls in purgatory in their preparation for triumph. And the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory are united with us in our efforts to make Christ a reality in our world. "I will reject no one who comes to me," the Lord said in our gospel for today, John 6:37 We trust in the God who loves us to care for us and our loved ones in life and in death. And so we pray, "May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace."

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