

## ALL SOULS DAY

November 2, 2020

This month, even here in the desert, the cool nights of autumn are upon us. Some trees drop their leaves. Each day finds darkness nibbling away more time from the bright light of day. In November nature reminds us in so many ways of the fact and reality of death, and what is inseparable from death -- the personal judgment of our life. So, this is a most appropriate season and day -- All Souls -- to pray for those we identify in the Second Eucharistic Prayer as “our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection, and all who have died in your mercy.”

The one thing we can say for certain about the future of each and every one of us alive today is that each and every one of us will undergo one day the experience of dying and that moment of passage we call death. Two moments in every life remain forever a mystery: the moment of birth and the moment of death. The moment of birth because no one remembers it; the moment of death because no one comes back to tell us about it.

Death seems to be the Lord’s surprise for us, and what happens after death is His surprise as well. Death and what follows it is perhaps the most mysterious part of our lives as Christians. Jesus Himself revealed so little about death and the hereafter, and what He did say was often more poetic than descriptive and factual.

So as Catholics what is our knowledge, what is our belief about death and what comes after it? Our best and most authoritative source is the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, Part One, Sections 11 and 12.

First, we believe that death is an experience that every human must face and undergo as a consequence of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Second, we believe that everyone at death faces a personal evaluation of his or her life. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans: WE SHALL HAVE TO APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF GOD; EVERY ONE OF US WILL HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS OR HER LIFE BEFORE GOD. In a sense we cannot fully prepare for the one-time experience of death, but we can and must be ready for the judgement of our life that will surely follow it.

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Third, we believe we know what the basis of our judgement will be. The Scriptures would seem to indicate that we will be evaluated on two things above all: our integrity and our charity. By integrity we mean trueness to our conscience and to God's personal plan for us, as we see it. The Carmelite mystic and Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross, thought we would be judged on one thing only: how much and how well we loved.

Fourth, we believe that our judgment will be made by a most loving, understanding and all-knowing Father/ Friend. God will weigh our whole life and not zero in on a particular behavior or even a set of behaviors we did or did not do at some given time, perhaps some many years ago.

Fifth, we believe that every virtuous action of ours will be remembered and rewarded, but also that for some persons there will need to be a further purification before they can experience God directly. We Catholics refer to this process as Purgatory from the Latin word for "cleansing".

Sixth, we believe that there is a linkage between us the living and those who have died. Our Catholic term is "Communion of Saints." We believe that by our prayers, our generosity and by other ways we can help those deceased in any purification needed. We also believe that even those undergoing this purifying process -- whatever its exact nature is the Church does not say -- that they can already assist us by their intercessory prayers.

No doubt before we ourselves die, we may witness others, relatives, friends, co-workers, even strangers, dying and die. The fingers of death pluck strange chords in the hearts of those who witness it. In some death stirs a deep sense of guilt. They tell themselves, if only I had done or not done this or that, the deceased might still be alive today. The death of another can in a real sense sadly diminish one's own vitality and zest for life. As our own death approaches, it is quite natural for us to feel weak, vulnerable and alone. When someone dear to us dies, it is normal for us to experience emptiness and a sense of loss and absence. The Gospels tell us

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that Jesus felt these same deep emotions, even to point of weeping, when learning of the death of a close friend of His such as Lazarus.

Let us then deeply reflect on and make our own the sentiments found in the Preface, preceding the Eucharistic Prayer on this Remembrance of All Souls.

**WE WILL HEAR: IN CHRIST OUR LORD, THE HOPE OF A BLESSED RESURRECTION HAS DAWNED. THOSE SADDENED BY THE CERTAINTY OF DYING SHOULD BE CONSOLED BY THE PROMISE OF IMMORTALITY. INDEED, FOR YOUR FAITHFUL ONES, LORD, LIFE IS CHANGED NOT ENDED, AND WHEN THIS EARTHLY DWELLING TURNS TO DUST AN ETERNAL DWELLING IS MADE READY IN HEAVEN.**

Finally, let us all pray frequently that familiar Catholic prayer for the dead: “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls, and all the souls of the Faithful Departed, through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.”