

Today we celebrate All Souls Day. We pray for those who have left us, that in death they may be reborn to eternal life in the presence of God in heaven. When Jesus died, he rose from the dead and spent 40 days on earth before ascending to be with his Father in heaven. If the sinless Son of God took 40 days before being reunited in heaven with his Father, we would be foolish to think we know how long it takes after death for a mere mortal to travel from here to eternity.

The Book of Wisdom speaks of gold in the furnace. When gold is mined, it has impurities in it. It is placed in a furnace so that the gold may be melted and separated from everything else. In this way, the gold is refined and purified. The human soul is more precious than gold. At death in many circumstances, the soul must also be purified. In order to be united with our perfect God, our imperfections must be taken away. We only have our earthly lifetime in order to confess our sins, to ask for the anointing of the sick, to seek viaticum, and to receive an apostolic pardon for our sins. “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC 1030).

If we die in a less than perfect state of grace, then after death, we must rely on the prayers of others to help us. This originates from the Jewish roots of our faith when in 2 Maccabees, Judas prays for the dead. “Thus, he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin” (12:46). Saint Faustina’s Diary also confirms this:

“In a moment, I was in a misty place full of fire in which there was a great crowd of suffering souls. They were praying fervently, but to no avail; only we can come to their aid (...) their greatest torment was longing for God. I saw Our Lady visiting the souls in Purgatory. The souls call her “The Star of the Sea”. She brings them refreshment” (#20). God does not want us to be separated from him, and so he has taught us special prayers like the Divine Mercy Chaplet through Saint Faustina to help purify and set a soul free.

As we, the living, pray for the dead, we help the souls that are in Purgatory to draw closer to eternal union with our loving God. Our prayer can take many forms:

- On this day of the dead, All Souls Day, we pray for all the faithful departed. And throughout the month of November, we keep the dead in mind and pray for them.
- This is in addition to praying for an individual at a funeral Mass at the time of death. We might also ask a priest to offer a Mass for the spiritual benefit of a loved one when it is some special anniversary or on any date that is available.
- “The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead: Let us help and commemorate them. If Job’s sons were purified by their father’s sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them” (CCC 1032, John Chrysostom).

When we enter a darkened room and suddenly turn bright lights on, our eyes hurt. It takes some time to adjust before we can see without pain. To enter into God’s presence, to see God as he truly is, many of us will need that period of adjustment for our souls so that we may see God in all his splendor and glory. So, let us pray fervently this day and every day for the souls in Purgatory that they may be set free to enjoy eternal life in God’s presence.