

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

WHY WE OFFER MASSES FOR THE HOLY SOULS

From 2 Maccabees 12:39-46:

“Judas and his companions went to gather up the bodies of the fallen and bury them with their kindred in their ancestral tombs. But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had fallen... Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. [Judas] then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection in mind; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus, he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin.”

At the time that Judas Maccabeus sent an offering of 2,000 silver drachmas to Jerusalem after his victory over Antiochus IV Epiphanes, many Jews had come to reason that the God of Israel, the God of Creation also had the power to raise the dead to life. One of the accounts of the Maccabees (*2 Maccabees 4*) in Old Testament records the words of a mother exhorting her seven sons, about to be murdered on account of their beliefs, not to forsake the God who gave them life in her womb: “the Creator of the universe who shaped the beginning of humankind and brought about the origin of everything, He, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law.” The sense of an eternal value which persists in the loves we experience in this life leads us to an unassailable hope that demands an answer to the scandal of death. If sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem could bring about an expiation of sins so the nation of Israel could enter into God’s presence in that sanctified place where heaven and earth met, then surely, they could offer that sacrifice for those who, now deceased, could no longer seek forgiveness for themselves.

Indeed, God did answer the incongruity of death by offering his own Son in expiation for sin so that a holy people could enter his presence both now and, in the life, to come. Each Mass we celebrate is the very

sacrifice Christ offered on Calvary. Each Mass is essentially the Victim placed into our very hands to offer back to God. In our prayer and celebration, through our communion with him, we become one with his sacrifice to the Father. It would not be unusual when we contemplate our life with Him here and in the hereafter to think of our loved ones. By our prayer for the dead at every Mass, we commend them to God’s love and mercy when we join our own sacrifice of prayer and praise to Christ’s. What does this mean? That in this life, we can still do something for them through our acts of prayer, faith, and love. St. Ambrose preached: “We have loved them during life; let us not abandon them in death, until we have conducted them by our prayers into the house of the Lord.” The Fathers of the second Vatican Council: This sacred council accepts loyally the venerable faith of our ancestors in the living communion which exists between us and our brothers who are in the glory of heaven or who are yet being purified after their death...” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, No. 51). Therefore, just as we pray for each other and share each other’s burdens now, the faithful on earth can offer prayers and sacrifices to help the departed souls undergoing purification, and no better prayer could be offered than that of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

This Monday, May 3rd, our book for Mass intentions in 2022 opens. See this bulletin for details.