

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls) - Lectionary: 668

Reading I - Wisdom 3:1-9

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace. For if before men, indeed, they be punished, yet is their hope full of immortality; chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself. In the time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble; they shall judge nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord shall be their King forever. Those who trust in him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love: because grace and mercy are with his holy ones, and his care is with his elect.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 R. (1) *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*

Reading II - Romans 5:5-11

Brothers and sisters: Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his Blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life. Not only that, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Gospel - John 6:37-40

Jesus said to the crowds: "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day."

Theology of Death and Resurrection - The Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell

This we know. Believers share in Christ's death and resurrection, which opens the way to eternal life beyond physical death. Though our bodies and souls will be separated in our mortal dying, we have the hope of the promises of Christ. Christ who said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where [I] am going you know the way."* Thomas said to him, *"Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"* Jesus said to him, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*¹

We long for this eternity after life in this world and we are moved by faith, hope, and love to confess our sins, many of us fearful of permanently losing our friendship with God. And yet, we go about our daily lives during the 'in-between' of this life and the next, often without mindfulness of 3 of the 4 last things²... death, judgement, and hell. Rather, when we are moved or spiritually prompted to recall who we are and for what we were made, we focus our attention on heaven and the promise of Jesus quoted above. In a sense this is our hope at work in us, the strength of the spirit in us that desires to possess in being all that was and is intended for us by God. But that hope is only natural, not the theological virtue of hope from God, if it doesn't also keep us awakened to realities of death, judgement, and hell. We are body and soul, flesh and spirit, material and immaterial, mortal and immortal.³

For a solid 25 % of the year the Church proposes for us, calls us to reflection on this truth. That from dust we came and to dust we will return. Death looms for us all. The younger we are the less we are actively aware of this truth. The less most of us are aware, of any tension between the flesh and the spirit. But the older we get, the more we experience this within ourselves and are influenced by this truth breaking into our lives in sad and sometimes tragic ways. Our growing awareness leads to fear. Fear of death, material at first, but for the conscious Christian, the reality of spiritual death also begins to arise along with fear. In the material sense, fear of death makes sense, insofar as we are designed to be a body soul unity and the interior knowledge of soul and body being separated at death rightly concerns us. However, as we spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically mature in Christ – we grow in faith, hope, and love such that we understand ourselves as created by God and made for eternal joy, beatitude. We humbly realize that yes, because of our fallen mortal nature death itself may be filled with sadness and pain but it is not the end, we rise in Christ with body and soul reunited, whole, eager for our eternity of unity in and with God.

Those who were spiritually mature at their passing, we celebrated yesterday on the feast of All Saints. Today is the commemoration the holy souls of those who were not yet spiritually mature. This commemoration of All The Faithful Departed—speaks to us more deeply of the totality of the community of the baptized as the Communion of Saints, a unity of three groups: the saints in heaven, the faithful on earth, and the souls undergoing purification, all connected through charity and prayer. The saints in heaven are the members of the Church Triumphant who are now enjoying a face-to-face relationship with God for all eternity. The second group, the Pilgrim Church or Church Militant, on its way to ultimate union with God in unending happiness. The third group who we remember today, have died but are not quite ready to meet God face to face. Most of us would probably acknowledge that we are far from perfect, and that we still need to go through some purifying process before entering the eternal presence of God. What that process is like, it is not for us to speculate.

¹ [John 14:1-6](#)

² <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/teachings/last-things-49>; Catechism of the Catholic Church #1020ff

³ <https://youtu.be/mTzNGUCJkm4?si=G8MNa-4XYTcOKAKx>

The overarching theme of the readings for today, is comfort. While we enter a season of reflection on the 'last things'. We do so having been encouraged by reflecting on our eternal reward by celebrating the Church Triumphant of the Saints in heaven. We do this, looking forward in thanksgiving for the life in Christ and pursuant Grace that makes possible our holiness, made possible by the incarnation of the Son of God. Having reflected on the last things throughout the month of November, we will enter the season of Advent as a time for the fruits of our current reflections to ripen in our actions oriented to preparation for the comings of Christ.

Commemoration of All Souls: This day honors all faithful departed who are not yet in the full presence of God, emphasizing prayers for their purification and eventual union with God. The Church is a good mother, and she knows that it is a good thing to think of and pray for the dead, so she gives us All Souls' Day. It helps us cut through life's superficial distractions and reminds us of the big picture, which includes life, of course, but which also includes death, judgment, heaven, and hell. All Christians believe in those four realities, about which Christ himself taught us.

But not all Christians believe in purgatory and therefore couldn't imagine the point of praying for those who have died. They say, among other things, that since the word purgatory doesn't appear in the Bible, it must have been invented by popes and bishops to frighten and manipulate ignorant Christians during the Middle Ages. What can we say to address this disbelief? Even though history shows that purgatory and praying for the dead are not 'new doctrines' used by evil bishops to manipulate ignorant Christians. Rather, not praying for the dead is the new practice, having begun in the 16th century! Perhaps the living Word of God could be helpful? In fact, Jesus himself talked about it a lot, shedding light on some of the awe-inspiring mysteries surrounding death. The New Testament teaches us that every person only dies once.⁴ That after dying we will meet our Lord face to face and receive judgment. And we know that if we die in friendship with him, we will spend eternity with him in heaven, though we may need to pass through purgatory first, to cleanse any leftover selfish tendencies that didn't get purified during our earthly life. And, finally, we know that if we die outside of God's friendship, he will not force us into his friendship after death but will respect our decision. And in that case, eternal separation from God, also known as hell, will await us.

The Feast of All Saints and the Commemoration of All Souls are two days of the year when the division between Catholics and other Christian traditions is very apparent. Yet, undaunted, this weekend the world's billion Catholics are all focused on the same thing: death, judgement, heaven, hell. We are united in our knowledge that we are a communion. The Saints in heaven can pray for us and we can pray for those who have died in Christ but not yet able to be in the presence of God. In fact, by virtue of their faith and life in Christ, it is the desire of their hearts for us to pray for them during their purgation.

Praying for the dead is a longstanding Christian practice that aids the souls in purgation and expresses love. Our prayers are a spiritual work of mercy that affirms our communion, a supernatural solidarity within the Church. St. Monica asked her son, St. Augustine, for his prayers before she died. "*Lay this body anywhere, and take no trouble over it,*" she told him. "*One thing only do I ask of you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be.*" He did not tell her it wasn't possible or wouldn't be fruitful. He believed as she did, as the Church taught and lived, as he said "*Not small is the authority ... of the whole Church,*" continuing, "*that in the prayers of the priest which are offered to the Lord God at his altar, the commemoration of the dead also has its place.*" Praying for the dead is something Christians have always done.

⁴ [Hebrews 9:27](#)

The theology behind this is simple. We are all born and die in Adam, our common mortal nature. Yet for those who believe in Christ, who St. Paul called the “last Adam,” there is another death, death that is first sacramental and then moral and then natural, but a [death](#) that ultimately opens to the resurrection, with believers rising with Christ on an endless Easter morning.⁵ And, just as in life, we love each other, sharing the goods and graces common to believers, so too may spiritual goods be shared between the living and the dead. These are the prayers we offer for the dead, which are basically a form of love, St. Thomas Aquinas taught, the “*bond uniting the members of the Church.*” St. Paul VI called this “*a supernatural solidarity.*”

More on the official Doctrine of Purgatory:

Purgatory is a Catholic doctrine that speaks of a final, loving purification for those who die in God’s grace but are not yet perfectly holy. It is not a second chance at salvation, but a merciful process that prepares the soul to enjoy the beatific vision of God. The Catechism teaches that “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”.⁶ This purification is called Purgatory and is distinct from the punishment of the damned. The fire of Purgatory is understood as the loving presence of God that cleanses the “spiritual residue” of sin, not a literal torment. Even when sin is forgiven, it can leave a “spiritual residue” that must be removed before the soul can fully share in God’s presence. The Church therefore sees Purgatory as a merciful act of God, allowing the soul to be made perfectly holy before entering heaven.

Scriptural and Tradition: Foundations

Catholics base Purgatory on both Scripture and Sacred Tradition (Councils of Florence and Trent), while many Protestants accept only Scripture (*sola scriptura*). Although the term purgatory does not appear in Scripture, the Church reads several passages as pointing to a post-death purification:

- 2 Maccabees 12:46 – “It is a holy and wholesome act to pray for the dead, that they may be delivered from the guilt of their sins.”
- 1 Peter 3:18-20 – Christ suffered for sins so that “he might bring them to God,” implying a process of purification before final judgment
- 1 John 5:7 – The formula of the Trinity is understood as a sign of the communion of the Church, including the dead
- The Apostles’ Creed – “He ascended into heaven, and will come again” is taken to refer to the final judgment that follows the purification

Understanding Purgatory invites a deeper appreciation of the Catholic vision of God’s mercy, the ongoing communion between the living and the dead, and the hope that every soul will be fully purified before entering the fullness of heaven.

Pray for the Church Penitent / Suffering... Do this Today... Do this everyday.

Briefing on the Theology of All Souls and the Afterlife

Executive Summary

This briefing synthesizes the theological principles concerning the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, focusing on the concepts of death, judgment, and the afterlife. The central tenets include the “Four Last Things” (Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell), which believers are called to contemplate in their entirety, rather than focusing solely on Heaven. A key doctrine is the Communion of Saints, which posits

⁵ [1 Cor 15:45](#)

⁶ [Catechism of the Catholic Church 1030](#)

that the Church is a single, unified body comprising the Church Triumphant (saints in heaven), the Church Militant (the faithful on earth), and the Church Penitent (souls in Purgatory). These groups are interconnected through charity and prayer. Purgatory is presented not as a final punishment, but as a state of loving, merciful purification for those who die in God's grace but are not yet perfectly holy. Praying for the dead is thus a vital spiritual work of mercy that affirms this "supernatural solidarity" and can aid souls in their purification. The overarching message is one of comfort and hope, rooted in Christ's promise of eternal life, which provides peace in the face of mortal death and encourages the faithful to strive for holiness.

1. The Four Last Things: A Call to Mindful Reflection

The provided sources emphasize the importance of contemplating the "Four Last Things"—Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell—as a complete theological reality. While believers are drawn to the promise of Heaven, this focus can result in a "natural hope" that is incomplete. A mature "theological virtue of hope" requires an awakened consciousness of all four realities.

- **Incomplete Focus:** The texts note a common tendency to focus on Heaven while neglecting death, judgement, and hell. This oversight can lead to a superficial understanding of the spiritual journey.
- **The Nature of Humanity:** Reflection on these truths is grounded in the understanding of human beings as a composite of "body and soul, flesh and spirit, material and immaterial, mortal and immortal."
- **Liturgical Emphasis:** The Church actively encourages this reflection, with one source stating that for "a solid 25% of the year," it calls the faithful to remember the truth that "from dust we came and to dust we will return." The month of November, beginning with All Saints' and All Souls' days, marks a specific season for this contemplation, preparing believers for the season of Advent.
- **Overcoming Fear:** While awareness of death can lead to fear, particularly the natural concern over the separation of body and soul, spiritual maturity in Christ fosters a shift in perspective. Death is understood not as the end, but as a temporary state before the body and soul are reunited in the resurrection.

2. The Communion of Saints: A Unified Church Beyond Death

A central theme is that the Church is a single, unified "community of the baptized, not separated by death." This "Communion of Saints" is described as a "supernatural solidarity" that connects all members through charity and prayer. The body of Christ is indivisible and is composed of three distinct but interconnected parts.

Church Division	Description	Role and State
The Church Triumphant	The saints in heaven.	They enjoy a "face-to-face relationship with God for all eternity." They lead the way and their intercession is sought, as their prayers are effective.
The Church Militant	The "Pilgrim Church" of the faithful on earth.	They are on a journey toward "ultimate union with God in unending true happiness." Their goal is heaven, not purgatory.
The Church Penitent	The "holy souls" undergoing purification (Purgatory).	They have died in Christ but were not yet "spiritually mature." They are guaranteed salvation but must be purified before entering God's holy presence.

This communion allows for the sharing of spiritual goods between the living and the dead. The prayers of the Church Triumphant assist the Church Militant, and the prayers of the Church Militant can assist the Church Penitent.

3. The Doctrine of Purgatory: A State of Merciful Purification

Purgatory is presented as a core Catholic doctrine rooted in Scripture and Tradition, understood as a merciful and loving process rather than a punitive one.

Definition and Purpose

- **A Final Purification:** Purgatory is for those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified." It is not a second chance at salvation but a necessary preparation to "achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," as scripture states that nothing unholy can enter
- **Guaranteed Salvation:** Souls in Purgatory are "assured of their eternal salvation." Their purification is a transition toward the beatific vision of God.
- **The Fire of Purgatory:** This is described not as a literal torment but as the "loving presence of God that cleanses the 'spiritual residue' of sin." Even after sin is forgiven, this residue may remain and must be removed.

Doctrinal and Historical Foundations

- **An Ancient Practice:** The sources argue that praying for the dead is a long-standing Christian tradition and that not praying for the dead is the "new practice, having begun in the 16th century."
- **Sacred Tradition:** The doctrine is formally affirmed by the Councils of Florence and Trent.
- **Scriptural Basis:** While the word "purgatory" is not in the Bible, the doctrine is based on scriptural interpretations, including:
 - 2 Maccabees 12:46: "It is a holy and wholesome act to pray for the dead, that they may be delivered from the guilt of their sins."
 - 1 Peter 3:18-20: Christ's suffering to "bring them to God" is seen as implying a process of purification.

4. The Role of the Living: Prayer for the Faithful Departed

The sources strongly advocate for the practice of praying for the dead as a fundamental expression of Christian love and solidarity.

- **Efficacy of Prayer:** The prayers of the living are effective and can "expediate" the purification process for the souls in Purgatory.
- **A Spiritual Work of Mercy:** These souls "fully cooperate" with God's purifying work but are in a state where they "cannot pray for themselves." The prayers of the living are therefore a crucial act of charity.
- **Historical Example:** The request of St. Monica to her son, St. Augustine, is cited as a powerful example: "One thing only do I ask of you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be."
- **A Daily Call:** The faithful are called to pray for the Church Penitent every day, to remember them in sacrifices, and to never forget "those we know, those we don't."

5. Overcoming Fear with Faith: Comfort in the Promise of Christ

Despite the solemn nature of death and judgment, the overarching theme presented is one of comfort and hope, grounded firmly in the promises of Jesus Christ.

- **Christ's Promise as Comfort:** The Gospel of John is quoted extensively to provide assurance and peace to believers troubled by the thought of death. Key promises include:
 - "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life."
 - "In my father's house, there are many dwellings... I am going to prepare a place for you."
 - "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- **The Goal is Heaven:** The purpose of life is not to aim for Purgatory but "to be able to skip that time of purgation completely and go straight into the arms of God." Purgatory is a mercy for those who, for various reasons ("untimely death, sickness... a lack of knowledge"), were not fully prepared despite their hearts belonging to Christ.
- **An Illustrative Analogy:** The homily uses a baseball analogy to explain the emotional and spiritual realities of the Church's life. The victory of a favored team (the Dodgers) is compared to the "joy" and "triumph" of

celebrating All Saints' Day. The loss of another team (the Blue Jays) is likened to the "sadness, wailing, nashing of teeth" associated with loss, placing them in a "baseball purgatory with the hope guaranteed that one day they will pass from this purgation into triumph." This illustrates the journey from imperfection toward ultimate victory.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
All Saints' Day	The feast day celebrating those who were spiritually mature at their passing and are now members of the Church Triumphant in heaven.
All Souls' Day	The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed; a day to honor and pray for all faithful who have died in Christ but are not yet in the full presence of God, undergoing purification in Purgatory.
Beatitude	The state of eternal joy and unending true happiness for which humans are created; the ultimate union in and with God.
Church Militant	Also called the Pilgrim Church, it refers to the faithful on earth who are on their journey toward ultimate union with God.
Church Penitent	Also called the Church Suffering, it refers to the holy souls in Purgatory who are undergoing a final purification before entering heaven.
Church Triumphant	The saints in heaven who have completed their earthly journey and now enjoy a face-to-face relationship with God for all eternity.
Communion of Saints	The unity of all the baptized, which consists of three groups: the saints in heaven (Church Triumphant), the faithful on earth (Church Militant), and the souls in Purgatory (Church Penitent). These groups are all connected through charity and prayer.
Four Last Things	The four final realities of human existence: Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell.
Purgatory	A Catholic doctrine describing a final, loving purification for those who die in God's grace but are not yet perfectly holy. It is a merciful process that prepares the soul for heaven and is distinct from the punishment of the damned.
Spiritual Residue	A concept related to sin; even when a sin is forgiven, it can leave behind effects or selfish tendencies that must be cleansed, a process which occurs in Purgatory.
Supernatural Solidarity	A term from St. Paul VI describing the profound spiritual bond uniting all members of the Church (living and dead), through which spiritual goods, such as the grace from prayers, can be shared.
Theological Virtue of Hope	A hope that comes from God, which keeps a believer mindful not only of the promise of heaven but also of the realities of death, judgement, and hell. This is contrasted with a "natural hope" that focuses solely on heaven.