

Meditations: November 2, All Souls Day

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the commemoration of all the faithful departed.

- Jesus promises us a home in heaven
- The souls in purgatory and our intercession for them
- The souls in purgatory: mutual help

LET NOT your hearts be troubled, Jesus tells us today. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms (Jn 14:1-2).

The commemoration of all the faithful departed offers us the opportunity to reconsider the reality of eternal life, to direct our affections towards the hope of the definitive encounter with true and never-ending love. None of us have crossed the threshold of death, so we don't know what that moment will be like. God has wanted, in his Son, to reveal what awaits us in his dwelling place.

“Yesterday and today, many have been visiting cemeteries, which, as the word itself implies, is the ‘place of rest,’ as we wait for the final awakening. It is beautiful to think that it will be Jesus himself to awaken us. Jesus himself revealed that the death of the body is like a sleep from which He awakens us. With this faith we pause – even spiritually – at the graves of our loved ones, of those who loved us and did us good. But today we are

called to remember everyone, even those no one remembers.”^[1]

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, Jesus continues, *that where I am you may be also (Jn 14:3).* “Man needs eternity, for every other hope is too brief, too limited for him. Man can be explained only if there is a Love which overcomes every isolation, even that of death, in a totality which also transcends time and space.”^[2]

“ETERNAL REST grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them,”^[3] we pray at the beginning of Mass today. The faithful departed who have not yet reached heaven experience both suffering and joy at the same time. Pain and happiness are mysteriously

intertwined in purgatory. The reason for their joy is the certainty that they will see God: they have won the battle, they have decided to be happy on earth and in heaven. They are one step away from glory, which is why Christian tradition calls them the “blessed souls in Purgatory.”

Even the suffering they experience there is a source of joy, because the souls accept it, fully surrendering themselves to the divine will. With a burning although still imperfect love, they adore the mystery of God’s holiness. Saint Catherine of Genoa, known especially for her vision of purgatory, “did not see purgatory as a scene in the bowels of the earth: for her it is not an exterior but rather an interior fire. This is purgatory: an inner fire. The Saint speaks of the Soul’s journey of purification on the way to full communion with God, starting from her own experience of profound sorrow for the sins

committed, in comparison with God's infinite love.”^[4]

In one of the Eucharistic prayers in the Missal, the priest asks God on behalf of everyone: “Remember also our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection, and all who have died in your mercy: welcome them into the light of your face.”^[5] Of all the suffrages that we can offer, the most valuable is the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. The Church, eager for these souls to reach heaven as soon as possible, today allows all priests to celebrate Holy Mass three times. She also encourages us to pray for these souls outside of Mass. The devotion of the Christian people finds in pious practices such as the holy rosary, responses for the dead and works of penance, a true path of prayer to intercede for the deceased.

COMMUNION with the whole Church, and in this case with the deceased, means that “our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.”^[6] The saints have been great promoters of this mutual help. Saint Alphonsus Liguori says that we can believe that “God makes our prayers known to the souls in purgatory. And thus, since they are so filled with charity, surely we can ask them to intercede for us.”^[7] Saint Therese of the Child Jesus frequently had recourse to their help, and after receiving it felt deeply indebted: “My God, I beg you to pay the debt I have contracted with the souls in purgatory.”^[8] Saint Josemaría also relied greatly on their help: “At the beginning I felt the company of the souls in purgatory very strongly. I felt them as if they were tugging me by the cassock, asking me to pray for them and to ask them for their intercession. Since

then, due to the great services they have done for me, I like to preach about and foster in souls this reality: *my good friends the souls in purgatory.*”^[9]

This experience of the saints shows us that our affection for those we love can reach beyond death. “No man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve . . . As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well.”^[10]

“We now turn to our Lady, who suffered the tragedy of Christ’s death beneath the Cross and took part in the joy of his Resurrection. May Mary, the *Gate of Heaven*, help us to understand more and more the value of prayer in suffrage for the souls of the dead. They are close to us! May she support us on our daily pilgrimage on earth and help us to never lose sight of life’s ultimate goal, which is Heaven”^[11]

^[1] Francis, Angelus, 2 November 2014.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Audience, 2 November 2011.

^[3] Entrance Antiphon, Mass for the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Audience, 12 January 2011.

^[5] Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer II.

^[6] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 958.

^[7] Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *The Great Means of Prayer*, ch. I, 3.

^[8] Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, *Last Conversations*, 6 August 1897.

^[9] Saint Josemaría, Words from 1967, quoted in Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Rialp, Madrid 2000, p. 187.

^[10] Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 30 November 2007, no. 48.

^[11] Francis, Angelus, 2 November 2014.

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