

[Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 23; Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40]

It is a teaching of our Catholic faith that every Mass we offer is for everyone: We honor the Church Triumphant by recalling the names of the angels and saints in Heaven. We remember the Church Militant, which is you and me, and everyone on this planet who is struggling, surviving and celebrating the fact that we can work with Jesus Christ in achieving our salvation. He died for us and for all, but in the new English, more literal and faithful translation of the Roman Missal, Jesus sheds His Blood in the Chalice. He says, "The Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." What does that mean?

It means that some of us on this planet choose not to work with Jesus for the salvation of the world. It means that if one freely chooses to reject Jesus Christ, his eternal salvation is at risk. Some say that the "unforgivable sin" that St. Paul speaks of is the utter despair that Jesus Christ cannot forgive all of our sins, even the most despicable ones in the deepest recesses of our heart. We think the power of our sins is stronger than God's power to forgive and heal.

The folks we pray for today are those who in their heart of hearts truly wanted to be faithful followers of Jesus, who have departed from this life in the grace and favor of God, but who are still in Purgatory, the Church Suffering, waiting for entrance into Heaven. They will eventually make it to Heaven, but still need some purification.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the New Jerusalem, which is Heaven. It describes Heaven in all of its glory, but with the warning that "nothing unclean will enter it." (Rev. 21:27) Entrance into Heaven requires purity of the soul, as we heard yesterday: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God." (Mt. 5:8) It is sin that stains the heart, which is why we try to avoid sin and why we go to confession if we fall into sin. But sin also has a ripple effect. While confession cleanses the heart and the soul, the damage caused by sin has already been done. We have to try and make amends for that damage. That's where penance comes in, but it also explains the reason for Purgatory.

Let's say that I break someone's window (sin). I tell that person that I'm sorry (confession) and he forgives me (absolution). That's great, but there's still a hole in the window that needs to be repaired and paid for (satisfaction). Penance is our way of paying off the debt, but if we die not having finished repairing the damage, there needs to be a way that we can continue doing so before we are able to enter Heaven. This is what takes place in Purgatory. In Purgatory, a soul is purified and prepared so that it is ready for entrance into Heaven. This is where All Souls' Day and praying for those who have died come in.

We are the Church Militant, the souls still fighting the good fight here on Earth. We pray with the Church Triumphant (the angels and saints in Heaven) to help us get through this life. We pray for the Church Suffering (the Souls in Purgatory) so that their entrance into Heaven may be swift. We do penances for them to help them fulfill their time in Purgatory. And we offer Masses for them because nothing is more valuable, no prayer more powerful than the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If they are already with God, our prayers deepen their intimacy with God, and our prayers make their prayers for us more powerful.

The Feast of All Saints, celebrated yesterday, and the Feast of All Souls, which we celebrate today, teach us that the Church is not just here on Earth. It is also in Heaven and in Purgatory. We who are here on Earth are still united through baptism to those who have gone before us. And that gives us great comfort. Catholics don't just "remember" the dead; *we remain united with them*.

Soon, we will hear the names of those who have died over the past 12 months in our community. A rose will show our love for them.

One of the best ways to commemorate All Souls' Day is to visit a cemetery. If it is done as a family activity, it can be a great way to teach children how we respect the dead. There is also the great tradition of offering Masses for those who have died. And to say throughout the day: Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN!