

[Readings: Isaiah 25:6, 7-9; Psalm 23; Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40]

You may have heard these two stories that connect us with today's observance of the Feast of the Faithful Departed, or All Soul's Day.

A prominent elderly gentleman sat down in the kitchen of his home with the morning paper for his usual breakfast. As he got comfortable in his chair, he snapped the paper to the front page. He gasped when he saw this headline: "Prominent local bank president dies suddenly," along with a photo of the man himself. Thinking that an obvious mistake had been made by the newspaper, he decided to phone the head of the board of directors of his workplace to tell him of the error.

The chairman answered the phone: "Hello?" "Hello," came the reply. "This is the bank president calling. Did you see the front page of today's morning paper?" "Yes," said the chairman of the board. "You're dead. And where are you calling from?"

The second story is about two women who had similar e-mail addresses, but they were different by one letter. The first woman had just lost her husband to death and had just returned home from the funeral. The second woman was planning to meet her husband in Florida. He was down there for business and got a free ticket for his wife, who still needed to pack and get to the airport. Her husband sent her a telegram updating his status. Unfortunately, he mistyped the email address and sent it by mistake to the widow. When the widow opened her email after getting comfortable at home, she was stunned to read: "Darling, arrived safely down here. Sure is hot. Can't wait until you arrive tomorrow. Your loving husband." The widow fainted.

Where are the souls of our loved ones whom we remember today? Where are they calling from? How hot is it where they are? As Catholics, we believe that their final destination is either Heaven, a temporary detour to Purgatory, or in Hell. So we pray for them by the help and the grace of the Holy Spirit, and we participate in their final preparations by our prayers and sacrifices.

Offering prayers for those who have died is ancient in origin. In the Old Testament's Second Book of Maccabees. Judas Maccabeus orders his army to pray and offer sacrifices on behalf of their fallen comrades. Tombs found in the Roman catacombs are inscribed with prayer requests for the deceased (2 Maccabees 12:46).

There are, sadly, some Catholics who do not believe in Purgatory. Happily, the Catholic Church still teaches that Purgatory is real.

Why? Because the Catholic Church believes in the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ, the reality of God's justice and mercy, and the fact that we have two options for eternity: Heaven or Hell. Smoking or Non-smoking.

But why do I say "happily"? Because Purgatory, properly understood, is the mercy and grace of God at work, and so is a revelation of His love. Of course, the misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Purgatory are many. It is sometimes presented as being on an equal plane with Heaven or Hell.

However, Purgatory is not a final destination, but rather a state of preparation for the destination of Heaven. Likewise, Purgatory is not part of Hell. Yes, there is suffering in Purgatory, but it is the joyful suffering of those being completely cleansed of all impurity so they can enter the presence of God.

Not all of the righteous are completely free of imperfections and lesser, or venial (Latin, *venia*, meaning "pardonable"), sins. Once the righteous die, they are bound for Heaven. But if they are not yet completely holy, they have need of further sanctification and therefore head to what C.S. Lewis described as a divine "washroom."

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: "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 (Paragraph 1031)

For those who choose Jesus Christ, for those who are faithful to Him in thought, word and deed, but not yet ready to see the Father and be with God for all eternity, Purgatory sounds like a good place to be temporarily. As Mother Angelica once said, "If I get sent to Purgatory, I don't mind sitting in the back of the bus, because I know where it's headed!" AMEN!