

St Pius & St Anthony All Souls Feast (would be 31st Sunday-2025) John 6:37-40

Today we mark the Feast of All Souls. If the readings and prayers sound familiar, then you are likely hearing an echo, in your ear from a recent funeral you've attended, because all of the readings and prayers in the All Souls Mass are also recommendations suggested by the church to use when planning a funeral. Some people have called the All Souls feast a generic funeral or an annual funeral for everyone, hence the name, – *All Souls*.

Considering our catholic liturgical year (calendar year), I love how our church dedicates the whole month of November to honor our faithful departed, to remember our deceased. It starts here with All Souls Day (*traditionally a person may make a point not only to come to mass that day & pray for the dead, but maybe also visit a cemetery, light extra candles in remembrance, review & display pictures, recite names, ring bells, or any other ritual of grieving – like a Catholic Memorial Day*). But we also spread this practice of honoring the deceased throughout the whole month of November. And it also happens to be that we are up to the final three Sundays of the yearly Mass reading cycle, which means our readings more and more sound a tone of 'The End Times-Last Days' (*maybe it is that time, maybe not*). Whether it's close to the 'Big End' or not, our church with its readings, wisely have us reflect upon our own end! For example, verses will repeat and reverberate through our final Sundays, such as “No one knows the day nor hour” (Matt 24:36), “Be vigilant and prepared to stand before Son of Man (2nd Coming-Judgement)” (Lk 21:36). So, don't be surprised, (really), that our readings take on a somber tone of an end approaching. I like to tie that theme from our church practice, tie it in, what is happening around us outside in nature. As the temperature grows colder, the leaves turn and fall to the ground, the sap retreats to its roots, the fields are harvested and their fruit stored, and the earth around us goes to sleep, so we also slow down ourselves. And what realization comes to our minds but the fact that, ***‘We are not here forever--the day is coming when we will be harvested too’***. November invites us to consider our own mortality and come to terms, facing our eternal destiny. What is next for us in this cycle of life & death?

I am reminded of the story of a grandfather and his grandson who used to always enjoy walking together over their farmland, making a special stop at their family cemetery up on the hill. That was precious time together. On one trip, the grandfather told his grandson, “You know buddy, the day is coming when you will make this trip up here alone.” Of course, the grandson thought

his granddad was just feeling particularly sentimental, that day about his own failing health, talking about himself. But the granddad meant it more generally, directing it to his grandson, that he consider his own death too, when even he would be carried alone up the hill to be placed to rest in the ground. Either way, both of them have it ahead of them (again like today's celebration-this applies to all of us) All Souls is 'Everyone's-All's Funeral'. *(By the way, it is a real act of charity for one's family, to go ahead and write out your wishes, your plans for your own funeral – there are some pamphlets on the table by church doors to help you think of aspects of funeral planning-readings & family roles)*

For many people, such reflections upon mortality can be difficult or we want to avoid them. But as People of Faith, we have so many resources to lean upon when coping through unsettling discussions about death. Our Faith provides the strength and assurances of hope to help us think about or make peace about whatever is next for us, following this earthly journey here.

Our readings today and so many more (if not every word of God itself-directs us to higher things, beyond and past all of this earth-bound experience here) which can comfort & inspire us with confidence to face such unknowns. I know I say such things a lot, like, "Oh this is my favorite verse" or "Here is a pet passage of mine", or "This says it all".....but..... I do love how Jesus' words today, of his protection and care of us are my favorite!

Jesus says in Jn 6:37 "I will ***not reject anyone*** who comes to me" and then adds, "I will not lose anything of what he gave me" (Jn 6:39) If Jesus has hold of you, then He has you. No losing you, no slipping out of His arms. Talk about Blessed Assurance! What a comforting thought regarding death!

His words remind me of so many of those trust building group activities, performed in team retreats, like when you may be blindfolded and someone trusted lead you through successfully through an obstacle course blind. Or when two people stand behind you with arms out, to catch you as you fall backward trustingly.

Or my own example of being taught how to float in the water by my mother. (Learning to Float, was my Hail Mary survival skill, because even though she signed us kids up for Red Cross swimming lessons when we were little, I got sick or afraid and didn't complete the week to get my card! My only hope then was to float!

It was an awesome lesson in trust, and reinforcing to us that someone (she) was holding us up safe (in her arms). We would lay back on the water's surface, and she would hold arms out like a rack to support us. She told us to

keep our body straight, chest up and out. She said the biggest challenge was to not panic, and to control the breath – hold, and then gently let it out, even as water encroached upon the chest, stay calm and learn when just the right time was, to exhale and then inhale, refilling the lungs again to maintain float.

It was an exercise in trust – trusting the hands that held you. And that is what Jesus is saying in today's gospel when it comes to death, facing our death. What is the catchphrase, that so many people in Human Resource Departments or counseling offices say? But, "Trust the Process." That is what our faith teaches – and Jesus tells us! Again, Jn 6:37, He says, *"I will not reject anyone who comes to me"* and that *"the will of the one who sent me is that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day"* (John 6:39) What could be better than that? We trust Him, He who went through already what we are facing. So, we are not facing it alone. What a comfort and assurance our faith offers us as we also face death, knowing that Christ will see us through it!