

Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls)

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Every single Eucharistic Celebration, including the Masses for the Dead, are celebrations of life. When a Christian dies, we celebrate the fact that life is changed, not ended. And this All Souls Day offers us a great opportunity for a reflection on why Catholics pray for the dead. Every Sunday we gather around the tables of the Word of God and of the Eucharist. The Communion table on which we celebrate each Mass is bigger than it looks. It goes on forever, back centuries, and across continents and languages. Here, we take our place with The Holy Trinity, with all the choirs of angels, and with the saints in heaven. Here on this altar, we are taken into the moments of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. We eat the bread and drink the cup as part of the family that includes everyone who has found life in Christ throughout the centuries. As Jesus offers himself in sacrifice, we pray for each other, for the world, and for our departed brothers and sisters.

In the supper of the Eucharist, God invites us from our own little worlds into a large world of truth, goodness and love. The relics of St. Gabriel that we have behind the altar also reflect what we are: A family that includes peoples from different ages, backgrounds, cultures, and nations, united by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, and nourished at the one Eucharistic table. Here we celebrate the mysteries of our faith in different languages, because we know that the Eucharistic table is inclusive. It is the dining room of humanity, and it is an anticipation of the eternal Holy Banquet. All are welcome here. So what does this feast of All Souls have to do with us? Today, we contemplate and meditate on the mystery of eternal life that was promised by Jesus. We believe that for all the saints who die, heaven is their new life, and for all other sinners, purgatory may be their temporal state. In purgatory, all those who believe in Christ are purified by the love of God before they are ready to be welcomed into the halls of heaven. Hell is the state of a soul of a person who didn't embrace a life of righteousness and love. Hell is actually isolation from God and from the human family. Also, we create our own versions of hell in this world when we do not follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as we commemorate everyone the death of Jesus, we also remember that when He died, He descended into the darkness of hell, to reach out in mercy to those who chose to live in the darkness of sin. We also commemorate Jesus' Resurrection, and his ascension into heaven. Therefore, in all

our Eucharistic prayers the Church offers around the altar prayers for all saints and all souls, and for all of us who are still on our journey of faith here on earth. And the Eucharistic table is actually the most powerful prayer ever offered for the living and for the dead, because in it, the sacrifice of Jesus is actualized, and we are immersed in its saving effects. During the celebration of Holy Mass, we enter into a Mystical communion with the Father who created the world, with Jesus who came back through death, and with the Holy Spirit who unites us in prayer and worship. Our prayers for the dead, offered with the Sacrifice of Christ, can help them reach the doors of heaven.

In the Gospel Jesus talks about raising us on the last day. This promise guarantees that, our bodies and souls will share the graces of the Risen Lord. Every Holy Mass we celebrate here on earth leads us closer to the great fulfillment of the promises of Christ, including that of eternal life.

Dear brothers and sisters: Today we are comforted with promises of life eternal. However we choose to live here and now, every single action during our lives has eternal consequences. Those who choose righteousness and love, those whose venial sins still make their righteousness and love imperfect will experience purgatory. And those who choose immorality and hate will be drawn from hell by God's saving love, manifested in the Crucifixion of Jesus if they accept it. This is a feast of hope. Our Eucharistic Banquet is a great anticipation of the Eternal Banquet in Heaven. As Jesus offers Himself as the unblemished victim, He also reaches out to those who might be right now in the darkness of their own hell, to bestow on them the graces they need to be purified and join God in heaven. As we celebrate this Holy Mass, let's take comfort in the promises of Jesus. He will raise us again.