

I once received a call on the emergency line about 20 minutes before the beginning of the Good Friday Liturgy of the Lord's Passion. The man's mother had passed away, and he was trying to find a priest to come and bless her, calling church after church to no avail. I told him that he was very unlikely to get ahold of anyone at this point as we were all heading into our churches for the somber celebration, but if he could wait I would come later that night.

After things wrapped up at the church, I started making my way to Queen Ann from West Seattle, admittedly thinking about the 20 or more churches that were closer. It was a dark, quiet night on the streets. When I arrived, the man rose to greet me - he had been sitting and drinking some tea. His mom was lying in a small regular bed in the front room. He had some music on, which I recognized. He and his mom loved to go to the opera and actually had tickets for the following week he said. He had decided to keep vigil with her through the night, and listen to various settings of the Requiem Mass. It was beautiful.

As we read the story of the last hours of the life of Christ, he sat with his mom through hers. As Mary kept watch with her dead son, so he was keeping watch with his dead mother while listening to the funeral prayers of the Church. It was Good Friday.

This Sunday begins our monthly commemoration of the faithful departed. We begin on the first day by celebrating those victorious with Christ in Heaven. And we spend the rest of month, beginning on the second day, praying for those who have died, as we commend them to the mercy and love of God, we who are still united with them in the love of God.

When we die, it is rare that we are perfect. And Jesus is very clear that nothing imperfect shall enter Heaven. That is something death cannot accomplish, the result of Original Sin. Nor Judgment. Which is why he gives us Purgatory, the mud room, to clean up on the way in. It is a part of his desire for us - that we may be perfect and glorified in him. St. Catherine of Genoa, who had visions of Purgatory, noted that you are happier there than you ever have been on earth. You have seen the vision of God and are that much closer. And the suffering is also greater, because you have seen the vision of God, and truly know for the first time the fullness of the goodness and love of God, and how distant we are from it. She noted that the soul freely chooses Purgatory, because it knows it's not ready for Heaven. On earth how often do we long for perfection? In Purgatory, that becomes possible and real, as we are made glorious for all eternity.

How sad to simply presume those we love are in Heaven, and thereby not aid them in their final journey. No matter how good they might have been, Jesus has even more in store for us. So yes, let us spend this month of November in particular praying for the dead - those we love, complete strangers, and in particular, those no one is praying for.