

## ALL SOULS' DAY, 2025

The Spiritual Body of Christ is all of the people in whom the Lord Jesus Christ dwells, through Faith and holy Love, or Charity. The Saints in Heaven, living fully in the presence of God, no longer require Faith, for they are filled with divine Love. That portion of the Spiritual Body of Christ prays for the Church on Earth. Members of the Church on Earth are walking by Faith and Love, and support each other on that walk in many ways, including prayer. Today, the Church directs to turn our attention to that portion of the Mystical Body of Christ which is no longer on this Earth nor yet in Heaven, journeying on its way to Heaven with Faith and steadily growing Love, through that experience that the Church calls "Purgatory."

No human being can experience God in His full reality while still imperfect. This is expressed by the Old Testament's idea that no man can see God and live. The New Testament reveals that, in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, the Second Person of the All Holy Trinity Who assumed Human Nature, God and Humanity are united. Jesus Christ has the power to perfect human beings, such that they can see God and live, making them perfect as He is perfect. Some people, by the time they die, have so cooperated with Jesus Christ that they are already perfect, such that they pass instantly from this world to the glory and joy of Heaven. Other people, one hopes only a few, but we really do not know and shouldn't pretend to know, have willfully rejected God and His goodness by the time they die, and therefore pass immediately into the "Second Death", the living death of hell. Many people, perhaps the great majority (as I suppose, though we cannot know), have not willfully rejected God and goodness, but are not yet made perfect in Christ by the time of their death. They are saved from sin and death by the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but must be purified and perfected before they can endure being fully in the presence of God. That experience (not place!) of purification and perfection is what the Church calls "Purgatory." Purgatory consists of an increasingly intense longing to experience God as He truly is. Purgatory also consists of a certain kind of pain, symbolically described as fire. We do not know what the "fire" of Purgatory really is. My own guess, and it is no more than a guess, is that this "fire" is being made fully aware of just what our sins are and just what harm they did. For most of us, a clear awareness of all that we did and failed to do really would burn.

Since the Departed experiencing Purgatory are enduring some kind of pain, albeit a pain mixed with certain and confident Hope for Salvation, they require a compassionate response from us. Compassion towards those who are suffering on earth is an essential part of being Christian. Today's observances remind us that there are many, no longer on this earth but not yet in Heaven, who are suffering. Their suffering is accompanied by a clearer and stronger Hope than sufferers on earth usually have, but it is suffering nonetheless. To help sufferers on earth, we perform the works of Charity that are entirely mandatory for all who bear the name of Christian. To help sufferers "in" Purgatory, we pray. The highest and most powerful prayer we have is the prayer the Lord Jesus gave to His Church on the Evening before His Passion, the Mystical Sacrifice of Praise that we call the Lord's Supper, the Blessed Eucharist, the Holy Mass. On All Soul's Day the entire Church solemnly offers Holy Mass for all the Souls "in" Purgatory.

From very early times, the Faithful would offer Holy Mass on the anniversary of a loved one's departure from this world, with a festive Mass for the anniversary of a Martyr's death, and

a Mass of supplication on the anniversary of anyone else's death. This was because Christians were sure that Martyrs, already in Heaven, had no need of their prayers. The Martyrs prayed for them. Regarding Christians other than Martyrs, they were unsure, and therefore offered prayers for them, confident that no prayer is ever wasted or without effect. This remains the Church's practice. The anniversaries of Saints' deaths are celebrated as Feast Days, either in particular places or throughout the Church. The anniversaries of other Christians' deaths are marked by Masses of intercession and supplication for them.

From early times, families would offer Mass on the anniversary of a member's death. Monasteries would do the same. Monasteries kept a careful record of anniversaries of deaths. As centuries passed, the list of deaths would simply become too long to manage. It became normal, one monastery at a time, to observe the first anniversary of a member's death with a special Mass, and otherwise to have one day a year when all of the monastery's dead would be prayed for with a solemn Mass. But what day?

Since the Irish Church had what it called a "Moses Lent" of 40 days before Christmas, monasteries in the Irish tradition (many of them far from Ireland) started the "Moses Lent" with an All Soul's Mass on November 14. On the other hand, by 800 A.D, most of the Latin Church celebrated All Saints' Day on November 1, and, little by little, more and more monasteries began to observe All Souls' Day on November 2, the day after All Saints' Day. Not long after 1000, the great Abbot St. Odilo of Cluny, Archabbot of the Church's largest and most prestigious federation of Benedictine Monasteries, ordered that all monasteries of his federation celebrate All Souls' day on November 2. After that, All Souls' Day on November 2 was rapidly adopted by all of the Latin Church's monasteries. From monasteries, this observance slowly spread to dioceses and parishes. By 1400, all of the Latin Church had adopted November 2 for All Souls' Day.

As we pray the Holy Mass for those departed who are experiencing Purgatory, we do so with confident Hope. Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, has already redeemed them from sin and claimed them from death. They feel our love when we pray for them, as they become like Jesus Christ, putting Him on perfectly. They already belong to Him. We have no anxiety about their final destination. We simply offer them support during the journey.

We Christians, on earth, those gloriously reigning with Christ in Heaven, and those passing through Purgatory, have all been purchased by Jesus Christ for Eternal Life. We are all washed in the Blood of the Lamb of God. The Blessed in Heaven already share fully in eternal Joy. We and those passing in Purgatory, by Faith, are walking surely towards that same joy. May We all be happily reunited in that fullness of joy .

Amen.