

## **All Souls' Day**

Gethsemani

2 November 2018

Dear Father Galvon, Deacon Ken, brothers and sisters gathered here to remember your beloved faithful departed, many of whom are buried here at Gethsemani:

### ***Introduction***

After yesterday's joyful celebration of all the Saints, from whom every tear has been wiped from their eyes (cf. Isa 25:6-9), the Church turns our attention to another vast throng within the supernatural solidarity of the Communion of Saints: the souls in Purgatory. Around the world, Catholics go to pray in the cemeteries where their loved ones have been laid to rest, as you do today. And our hearts and minds turn more soberly to thoughts of death.

### ***Death***

The modern world often turns death and dying into the entertainment of video games and nightly TV death tolls. By trivializing it, death is robbed of its solemnity and even its awe.

But, ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, death has been a brute fact of human existence. Though sometimes we might reasonably welcome death, our normal response is to recoil. All bodily beings naturally resist coming to an end, even if such an end is natural and inevitable. Similarly, all spiritual beings resist coming to an end, because that is deeply unnatural for them. For beings like us, uniquely both body

and soul, death means a unity torn asunder. To be confronted by this loss of someone we love, or by this possibility for ourselves, is to be forced to ask the question: “what happens next?” “is there another stage on the journey?”

Today, on All Souls’ Day, we remember those who are still on their way home to the Father’s house, even though they have passed through the doors of death: the souls in Purgatory.

### *Life as a Journey*

We are made by God and we are made for God. As St. Augustine once put it, our hearts will always be restless until we, finally and forever, find our rest in God. Our present life, with all its beauty, its possibilities, its challenges and its inevitable moments of suffering and even failure, is an extraordinary, complicated, exciting and often unpredictable journey. It is a pilgrimage, whose goal is a final encounter with the God who created us.

For disciples, our journey is a daily commitment to say “yes” to God’s offer of himself and of his love. This determination to hand over our lives to him by living each day as committed disciples and friends of Jesus unfolds only gradually in our life. The journey began at our Baptism but develops with increasing intensity over time.

The truth is, of course, that for most of us our journey is still ongoing. Our “yes” to God is never as complete, as generous, as final as

we would like it to be, and as it should be. And if this is true of each one of us here this evening, it is more than likely that it will still be true for us at the time of our death, “when each of us will be accountable to God” (Rom 14:12). At the end of our lives, if we die still compromising our “yes” to God with too many “no’s,” then in his goodness he will continue the work of completing in us what is as yet unfinished, so that we will then be everything God created us to be.

Through lives of faith, hope and love, through repentance from sin and co-operation with grace in good works, the souls of our deceased maintained, however imperfectly, their friendship with God, and so have been found worthy to enter God’s Kingdom . . . but just not yet.

### ***What Happens in Purgatory?***

God’s work of continuing to shape us for eternal beatitude, of purifying us, is what we call Purgatory. It will be a painful process, as true growth often is. But it is God’s final act of love for us as he fully equips us for the destiny for which we were made: to see him as he really is and enter into an intimate communion of life and love with him and the Angels and Saints for ever.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Timothy Costelloe, Homily (2 November 2014).

Cardinal Ratzinger once described Purgatory as “the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole Communion of Saints. Simply to look at people with any degree of realism at all is to grasp the necessity of such a process... Man is the recipient of divine mercy yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy.”<sup>2</sup>

Every trace of attachment to evil will be eliminated, every imperfection of the soul corrected. Our purification must be complete. Those who, after death, exist in this state of purification, let us not forget, already live in the love of Christ. It is he who removes from them every trace of imperfection.<sup>3</sup>

### ***What Can We Do?***

While it is the good Lord who purifies the souls with the intensity of his loving gaze, he invites us who are still on earth to pray for them. From the earliest times Christians prayed for our deceased loved ones. If the dead were already in heaven this would be nonsense. All Soul’s Day

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<sup>2</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 230-231

<sup>3</sup> Cf. DS 1304, 1580 and 1820.

would be absorbed into All Saints' Day. After all, there's nothing we can do to purify the Saints!

The Scriptures, as we heard in the First Reading from the Second Book of Maccabees, declare that it a good and pious thing to pray for dead (cf. 12:45). Our Tradition tells us we've a role to play interceding for one another, including those who have died. Our prayers and sufferings offered for the holy souls quicken the process of their being readied for heaven.

Purgatory is a work of divine mercy, so it is a cause of hope not only for our faithful departed but also for us awaiting judgment. However much we've messed up our lives, if we turn back to Christ, he will fix us. And, as we heard in Deacon Ken's proclamation of the Gospel, Jesus will take all heavy burdens from us and give rest to our souls in heaven (Mt 11:25-20).<sup>4</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Anthony Fisher, Homily (2 November 2015).

And so, dear friends, if you grieve the loss of your loved ones, if you weep for them, then nothing is more natural and normal than to pray for them: to remain in communion with them and to do what you can, as the Church instructs us: to pray that eternal light will shine upon them. In fact, praying for them is the best thing you can do, far more efficacious than merely remembering them or celebrating their life. There is no substitute for beseeching the Lord of Mercy for the soul of one whom you loved – and continue to love.<sup>5</sup> “Grant, we pray, to your departed servants that, with the mortality of this overcome, they may gaze eternally on you, their Creator and Redeemer.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Aidan Nichols, *Year of the Lord’s Favour*, vol. 1 (Gracewing: Leominster, 2012), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Collect 3 for All Souls, *Roman Missal*, p. 975.