

That Everyone May Have Eternal Life

“All Souls Day “

John 6:37-40

Today is “All Souls Day”.

It is significant that it follow “All Saints Day”—as we shall see, a wise order.

The practice of praying for the “faithful departed” began as early as 2nd century, became a more formal *communal* celebration in certain monasteries in the 900s, and was made a celebration for the whole Church in the 13th century.

What exactly are we celebrating, and why do all the “souls” follow all the “saints”?

Well, everything hinges on the fact that we will one day die.

Upon death, we will encounter our Maker, our God, Who is pure love.

And only that which/those who are pure love can enter the presence of Love.

They go first.

If one is not oneself pure love, then one must be *pure*-ified by love

...so that there only be love.

On “All Saints Day” (November 1),

we thank God for all those who are fully in His presence,

and whom He deigns use as instruments for us, who intercede” for us.

The saints are either

- *publicly* recognized (e.g. Saint Louis), thanks to
 1. certain signs, manifestations of pure love at work through them
 2. the inner sense the believing community has in prayer
- *secretly* recognized, i.e., only known to God.

On “All Saints Day”, we thank God for the Saints, for they are, in the end, His doing, and we ask the Saints precisely to intercede for us, i.e.

- to draw us into the mystery of God
- to participate actively in the pure-ification of our hearts

On “All Souls Day”, we pray for the dead not yet *fully* joined to God. Now, how does one know in which “camp” a deceased loved one is? One does not!

Consequently, we pray *to* them and pray *for* them.

To pray for someone—deceased or living—is to hope for them.

It is interesting and important to note:

- We cannot *believe* for another person.
- We cannot *love* for another person.
- We **can** *hope* for another person (because of our bond with him/her, and because God *is* love, and, therefore, *all-merciful*)

Thomas Aquinas (+1274) says:

“Divine love is the bond uniting the members of the Church, extends not only to the living, but also to the dead who die in love. For divine love which is the life of the soul, even as the soul is the life of the body, has no end: ‘Love never ends’.” (1 Cor. 13:8)

And what occurs when we hope?

When we hope for ourselves, we hold God, Who holds us.

When we hope for someone else,

we ask God to hold him/her gratuitously and unconditionally

—knowing that He will because He *is love*—

and, in that embrace, to purify in a special way

...that there only be love.

This ultimate purification by divine love is what we call “Purgatory”.

Of course, not all Christians believe in Purgatory

(even though they trust the early Church for all sorts of other beliefs...).

Oh well: their loss!

Purgatory is an amazing expression of mercy.

Saint John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, who died in 408, says,

Let us help and commemorate the deceased.

**If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice,
why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead
bring them some consolation?**

**Let us not hesitate to help those who have died
and to offer our prayers for them.**

I suppose then that the key question might be:
How can there be further purification?
Upon death, have not all the cards been dealt?
Is not the “personal judgment” the final verdict?

Let me answer with a question:
How is God a “just judge”—as the psalmist says?
God necessarily judges *according to who He is*.
Who has He revealed Himself to be?
He has revealed Himself to be *light and love*.
Upon death, we *encounter* (not just, stand before) God,
an encounter that will be *luminous and loving*, i.e. consonant with who He is.
This is how He is “just judge”.
His judgment is not the giving of a sentence, of a verdict.
His judgment is an *encounter*.
Those who, upon this encounter, choose to enter into the final Embrace
(during that “moment” between clinical death and actual death)
may not be fully ready for the presence of God.
For them, divine love must labour still.
God, of course, lovingly intervenes largely upon request.
The dead then, although alive (in their souls),
cannot act (i.e. request) without their bodies.
Consequently, they depend upon us, upon our prayer.
Today, we pray for them in a special way.

Today’s gospel (John 6:37-40) reveals the desire of God for us,
the desire of God for this encounter.

“This is the will of the one who sent me,
that I should not lose anything of what he gave me,
but that I should raise it on the last day.”

This is the will of my Father,
that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him
may have eternal life,
and I shall raise him on the last day.”

What has the Father given to the Son? Everything and everyone!
God wants everything for us, and God gives everything for us.
Let us rejoice!

Let us receive eternal life *today*.
Heaven, i.e. the life of God, begins today—if we welcome the gift.
Christ, whom we believe to be the God-man, brings us this gift,
and He wants to bestow it upon all the deceased,
all of our loved ones (and not-so-loved ones!) who have passed.
Let us place them, by our prayer, in His heart.
Let us be filled with hope and gratitude for them.