

All Souls Day
November 2, 2025
St. Edward's Parish

Friends, today the Church celebrates All Souls Day, a day set aside to pray for the faithful who have died. In fact, during the whole month of November the Church places a special emphasis on prayer for the dead. Therefore, I thought it would be fitting to consider this ancient practice.

At the heart of our prayers for the dead, is what we call the *Communion of Saints*. This means all those who are joined to Jesus Christ by faith and baptism are united by a spiritual bond. St. Paul speaks of us as members of the body of Christ (e.g. Rom 12:4). This includes the saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory, and the living on earth. We can pray for each other. The saints can pray for us, we can pray for each other and for the souls in purgatory who are preparing to enter heaven. Unfortunately, it seems that our understanding of Purgatory has gotten lost in recent years, and if we do not understand Purgatory then we cannot understand the practice of praying for the dead.

The word *purgatory* is related to *purge*, which means to cleanse or purify. Purgatory, therefore, is a state after death where our souls are purified before entering heaven. It is not eternal. Heaven and hell are eternal, but purgatory prepares for heaven. Recall that Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Our hearts must be pure before they can see God in heaven. Here is how the Catechism describes purgatory: "*All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven (CCC 1030).*" It is not a long and complicated doctrine, but rather simple.

The strongest biblical foundation for praying for the dead is in the Second Book of Maccabees. This book describes a time when the Jews defended themselves courageously against a foreign nation. During one battle, a number of Jewish soldiers died. When the others returned to bury them, they noticed all the dead soldiers had been wearing small amulets of an

idol, which they were forbidden to wear. This revealed a lack of trust in God. The leader of the army, Judas Maccabaeus, took up a collection and had sacrifices offered in the Temple for their sins. The Scripture says of his action “it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin. (2 Macc 12:46)” Later in the New Testament Jesus says, “whoever speaks against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Mt 12:32)” Thus, He implies that certain sins can be forgiven in this life, and some others can be forgiven afterwards.

If we die in a state of grace, that is free from mortal sin, we are assured of going to heaven. However, if our souls have not been perfectly purified during this life, we must be purified of all the defects that our sins have left behind. We can pray for the dead to assist them in this purification. For those who have lost loved ones, this can be an immensely consoling practice. We often long to do something good for our deceased loved ones, and prayer is a gift we can give them.

Praying for the dead is the central thing we do at a funeral Mass. We offer the Mass, which is the greatest prayer of the Church, for the soul of our deceased loved one. Often today people speak of a funeral as a “celebration of life” as if the only thing important was remembering the life of our loved ones. But that is not at the heart of a funeral Mass. Certainly, it is good to remember our loved ones. The funeral Mass, however, is offered so that we can pray for our deceased. Purgatory is not a grim and depressing idea; rather it is a great mercy of God that we can be purified after death and prepared for heaven. Purgatory also offers us the consolation of knowing that we maintain a spiritual bond with the dead and that we can do good for them by our prayers. During this month of November, I invite you to consider ways that you can improve your understanding of Purgatory and pray for those who have died.