

“Death is not hopeless because of Christ’s resurrection!” These are the words of Pope Francis concerning All Souls’ Day (Nov.2, 2016) They are, for us, words of hope and renewal as we consider our prayer for all souls on this day.

The Church, in her wisdom, has put together the Feast of All Saints and the Memorial for All Souls as a reminder to us that God has a plan for the rescue of all the souls of the faithful departed! We are inspired by the lives of the saints, especially of the canonized saints we know and celebrate throughout the year. And we are inspired by all those saints who may never be known by canonization, but who, in their private and quiet lives, have been examples of the love of God and neighbor. For all of them we give thanks, and we commend ourselves to their inspiration and intercession for us in the communion of saints.

At the same time we all know that most souls struggle in this life! Perhaps even we, ourselves! There are few people who desire to do harm or do evil in this life, but most of us have our shortcomings, our faults, and the mistakes we make day in and day out. When we die we are destined for heaven, but we may not be ready for it, yet! This is what the Church calls purgatory — that time of being prepared for heaven. And this is why we can pray for all souls! We offer our prayers for them, and we offer our sacrifices and good works for their benefit, because we want them to enjoy the face of God as soon as possible!

Some people take our Catholic understanding of purgatory in the wrong way. They see it as something negative, dark, foreboding. They see it as pain and punishment. But in truth, for us, the teaching

on purgatory is a teaching that should bring joy to us, because it means that the soul is heaven - bound, on the way to glory! It is the process, if you will, of the making of a saint! For this reason, it should give us hope! Beyond our sins and our shortcomings is the grand mercy of a loving and forgiving God who wants us, desires us, to be His own! And so, today can bring us joy, just as yesterday did! We can agree with the Holy Father, "Death is not hopeless because of Christ's resurrection!"

The Book of Wisdom from the Old Testament says "the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them there." We need to take God at His word and truly believe this! We need to believe that Christ is our Good Shepherd, who will lead us to the green pastures of heaven. We need to trust that Jesus is our resurrection and our life!

We need also to reflect on how we may live our own lives in the light of the inevitability of death, which shall come to each one of us. How can we prepare for heaven? Fortunately, Jesus gave us the answers to the final exam in St. Matthew's Gospel, in the 25th chapter. The final exam is this:

"When I was hungry, did you give me to eat? When I was thirsty, did you give me to drink? When I was naked, sick, or imprisoned, did you visit me and clothe me? When you did these things for one of my little ones, you did it to me!"

Today, let us pray for our beloved deceased, that their souls may know the splendor of heaven! And let us also rededicate ourselves to the love of God and neighbor in our own lives! Even if we have failed yesterday, or even earlier today, let us recall that we have

a merciful Father who is always ready to forgive, to heal us, and to renew the gift of love in our hearts. We can begin loving God by loving our neighbor, especially the most needy. Let us strive to join the communion of Saints!