

November

Musing on Life and Death

Veneration of the dead: a time-honoured tradition in the Catholic Church, found even in the Old Testament Prayers and Alms.

Autumn is the dying season, the harvest is complete, the trees that shine like rainbows in September and October change as November arrives and the leaves pass away and the tree trunks and branches are shellacked black by chilly rains.

The traditional time to visit the graves of loved ones, as the anniversary of their deaths.

The entire month of November falls during the liturgical season known as Ordinary Time and is represented by the liturgical colour green. During November, as in all of Ordinary Time (Time After Pentecost), the Liturgy signifies and expresses the regenerated life from the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is to be spent on the model of Christ's Life and under the direction of His Spirit. As we come to the end of the Church Year, we are asked to consider the end times, our own as well as the world's.

"Praised be to you, Sister Death, from whom no living being can escape. Beware those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom Death will find in a state of grace."
St. Francis of Assisi

"One generation passes and another arrives, but the world remains the same" (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

"Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!" (Eccl 1:2)

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought to be an affliction, and their going forth from us utter destruction. But they are at peace" (Book of Wisdom 3:1-3).

These verses are typically applied to Martyrs and used frequently in the Mass of Christian Burial.

As Catholics we celebrate the birth into eternal life of our beloved dead, the birthright of the Christian received at Baptism. We can communicate with loved ones beyond the grave through Scripture, the Sacraments, and through prayer. The perpetual light of the Lord shone upon the souls of the just, even during the Church's darkest moments, in an era, when it seemed that the World was ending because of the marauding barbarian tribes. Gregory the Great convinced Attila the Hun to spare the City of Rome, and the Pope preserved the Christian heritage and the advancement of art, liturgy, and education. A great light shone on the Church even in the darkness.

In the Creed, we pray that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead and that "his kingdom will have no end."

On All Saints Day (1st November), we honour the holy men and women, who have journeyed through life to unite themselves with Christ.

On All Souls Day (2nd November), we commemorate the faithfully, or not so faithfully, departed who pray for us beneath the purifying light of purgatory, as we pray to hasten their entrance into the eternal realm of the Trinity, Mary, the Angels, and the Saints.

Purgatory is the state of cleansing a soul undergoes, when it has died in God's friendship. The Church encourages the faithful on Earth to assist these souls through prayer and penance. We can pray the souls out of purgatory into Heaven and they pray for us while they await the Beatific Vision (the ultimate direct self-communication of God to the individual person - redemption - perfect salvation.) Heaven is a state reserved for those who, having attained salvation, enter into the glory of God. Hell is the realm of Satan and his fallen angels and for those who willingly reject God. It is a condition of sensory pain and separation from God that never ends. We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. At the End of the World, which will be also the End of Time, purgatory will close for ever; it is only the place of temporary reparation: St Paul tells us, "The Lord Himself shall come down from Heaven ... and the dead who are in Christ shall rise." The Messiah will return then the universal judgment, every sentence given by God, whether for heaven or for hell, will be absolute, and will be executed immediately and completely.

By the practice of Indulgences, especially by offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Church places at the charitable disposal of the faithful the inexhaustible treasure accumulated, from age to age, by the superabundant satisfactions of the Saints, added to those of the Martyrs, and united to those of our Blessed Lady and the infinite residue of our Lord's sufferings on the Cross. One can gain a plenary indulgence, applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, by visiting a cemetery each day between November 1st and November 8th. A partial indulgence can be obtained by devoutly visiting a cemetery and praying for the departed, even if the prayer is only mental. A plenary indulgence, again applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, is also granted when the faithful piously visit a church or a public oratory on November 2nd, but one Our Father and the Creed must be recited.

A partial indulgence, applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, can be obtained when the Eternal Rest (Requiem Aeternam) is prayed. It can be said throughout November.

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May the souls of the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God,
rest in peace.
Amen.

(From the Acts of the Martyrdom of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas A.D. 203)

The culmination of the liturgical year is the Feast of Christ the King, which is at the end of November. This feast asserts the supreme authority of Christ over human beings and their institutions... and even death itself. Beyond it we see Advent dawning with its perspective of the Lord's coming in glory.

This month the main liturgical feasts are:

The Solemnity of All Saints (November 1st)
All Souls (November 2nd)
St. Martin de Porres (November 3rd)
St. Charles Borromeo, (November 4th)
Lateran Basilica (November 9th)
St. Leo the Great (November 10th)
St. Martin of Tours, (November 11th)
St. Josaphat (November 12th)
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini (November 13th)
St. Albert the Great (November 15th)
Sts. Margaret of Scotland and Gertrude (November 16th)
St. Elizabeth of Hungary (November 17th)
Presentation of Mary (November 21st)
St. Cecilia (November 22nd)
Sts. Clement I and St. Columban (November 23rd)
St. Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions (November 24th)
St. Catherine of Alexandria (November 25th)
St. Andrew (November 30th).

*The Solemnity of Christ the King whose date changes annually, depending on the day of the week that St Andrew's Day falls on, it is the Sunday before St Andrew's Day.

