

Remembering the Faithful Departed in November

By The Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, Bishop of Brownsville

On November 2, we celebrate All Souls' Day, and during the Mass we piously remember the faithful departed. The Church begs God's mercy upon all the souls who must pass through a necessary purification before entering into God's full glory. The day reminds us, in a certain way, of the Church's approach to three important points of the faith, 1) the reality of sin in the human heart, 2) the role of the Church in the world, and 3) the efficacy of prayer before God's throne. I will take each point in order to offer a small catechesis on the Church's focus during the month of November; this in turn helps us develop a Christian attitude that should be a part of our lives throughout the year.

The reality of sin: It is a fact that today's world is not conscious of what the word "sin" signifies. In essence, it has to do with misguided love, or, in other words, to love a certain activity, thing or person more than God Himself. Adam loved his own will more than the will of the God who created him. Sin offends God because it arises from a lack of confidence in his wisdom and goodness. Jesus came to the world to enkindle once again a confidence between human beings and the God of heaven and earth. The Lord Jesus called the crowds to seek perfection, in other words, to leave sin completely behind. He himself said that the way to life was an arduous journey, and a narrow path. However, our eternal lives depend upon this journey.

The role of the Church: the Church is the communion of those attracted by Our Lord's grace to walk with Him and with our brothers and sisters in the faith, toward the reward which the Lord has shown us and has prepared for us. The Church has received the charge to apply the remedies of grace to heal the wounds of sin. Among these remedies, the seven sacraments are the most important. Among them, the Eucharist and Penance are the ones that accompany us more frequently. The Body and Blood of our Lord is the nourishment that sustains us in charity, or in that divine love that gives us strength to love God first, above all, and to love our neighbor according to Jesus' example. In reality, we face a battle within ourselves, a battle between God's grace and sinfulness. Penance helps us rededicate our efforts to a Christian life when we find ourselves in some manner defeated by the power of sin inside our hearts. By confessing our sins and asking God for the grace of a repentance each day more profound, the Christian grows in his love towards God.

The efficacy of our prayer before God: All this tell us that the principal role of the Church is to prepare us for eternity, to teach us to live in this world so that we can

rejoice eternally in the presence of the Holy Trinity. The Church knows, because Jesus Christ showed us, that only the soul which completely (single-heartedly) seeks God's presence and has, by his grace, overcome the attraction to sin, can be admitted to the majestic presence of the Most High. That is why we pray for the souls in purgatory, those souls who need purification because of their attraction to sin. So how is it that our prayers help the dead?

The Church is formed as the Body of Christ in the world, and Christ is the head of this body. The Scriptures teach us that Christ lives at the right hand of the father. As the Body of Christ, we participate in His prayer before the Father. Christ prays for us and we pray for all of mankind. Jesus offers God's forgiveness to each person and the Church tries to emulate that offering, praying that all will benefit from God's grace. This prayer of the church is in accord with the will of God, who wants us to identify with his very own desires. This prayer of Head and Body extends its effects even to the region where souls await the final victory of God's grace. The Lord wants our prayers and accepts them as pleasing offerings for the good of the souls that we commend to him.

For this reason, Catholic traditions such as attending Mass on the Feast of All Souls, visiting the cemetery during the month of November to offer prayers, and to place flowers there, are good and holy customs. These traditions remind us of our obligation in Christ to ask God to forgive those who have died, especially our loved ones. I ask that you remember your loved ones during Mass and while praying your Rosary. It is not possible that death break the bonds of kinship and friendship that have been cultivated in life. Your prayers are an effective way to participate in Christ's mission. The role of the Catholic Church and of every Catholic is to ask God's forgiveness for all. This is what God desires.

May the souls of all our faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

May it be so.