

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on All Souls' Day  
November 2, 2014

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There is a swift and dramatic transition from the November 1<sup>st</sup> celebration of All Saints' Day to the more somber November 2<sup>nd</sup> Commemoration of All Souls. Holy Mother Church is concerned that we believe rightly. We don't go in the right direction by believing wrongly! Ever the realist, and ever concerned for our pursuit of holiness, and that nothing sidetrack or derail us in that pursuit, the Church offers no short cuts to Heaven. She offers only the Christ-revealed (and Church experienced) *Way of the Cross*.

What exactly does the Church teach about All Souls' Day? Most followers of Christ do not die completely wedded to sin. But with our characters imperfectly formed and with many traces of sin remaining in us, most of us pass from this life to a state of purification, schooling, and discipline. That purification is to make us ready for the life of Heaven itself.

Please God, that state of purification is where our departed loved ones are or have been. And we want to remember them. We want them to know that we still care for their condition. Holy Church gives us All Souls' Day not to encourage us to remember our departed loved ones one day year but to encourage our living what we say we believe in the Creed when we affirm The Communion of Saints. All Souls' Day, and the month of November dedicated to remembrance of the Holy Souls, encourages us to remember them always. They are not asleep. They are awake. Tertullian put it this way, "Souls do not sleep even when men are alive. It is the province of *bodies* to sleep."

A second thing to remember is that these departed souls are not burning as if in some fiery torment. Holy Souls are men and women, boys and girls, who died in a state of grace. They built their character on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Any defects remaining are being done away *as* by fire. That is not the same thing as saying they are burning! Apart from any other considerations, it is clear that material fire could not affect an immaterial spirit. The *symbol* of fire, however, is instructive. It suggests the idea of pain and purity. Pain, as in *growing* pains, And purity, because Heaven, not destruction, is the goal. So forget about departed souls being either asleep or burning in fire.

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The dominant and pervasive attribute of the Church Expectant is far more positive. There is *joy*. These are *holy* souls. Unlike us, their eternal lot is fixed. No one flunks out of purgatory! In the Church Expectant there is no longer any distraction, any change of purpose, or vacillation, no shadow of fear, and no duplicity of purpose to darken the illumination of the Gospel. The Requiem Mass proclaims of the holy souls departed they “rest from their labors.” *This is contrasting them to us.* We strive and contend with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Holy Souls do not. They are at peace. Holy Souls have a *joy* in the complete assurance of final happiness, *joy* in the absence of sin and temptation, and *joy* in a closer and clearer vision of God and the promise of a more intimate fellowship with Him than any of can know on earth.

If our departed loved ones loved us in this life *they love us still*. If we ever did anything in love and kindness for them on earth we can do the best ever for them now by praying for them. It is natural that we pray for our kinsfolk and benefactors. We must *also* pray for those we have led astray by bad example. We must pray for those who are still far from Heaven. We must pray for some who are friendless and have no one to pray for them. And remember there are some souls being purified from the very faults to which we are still most addicted. Praying for them may have a salutary boomerang effect we cannot fully realize in this life.

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord” says St John the Divine. That sums up the Church’s teaching about purgatory. The Church Expectant is where the holy souls are. Whatever is happening there, in whatever way, our beloved departed are not losing, even if they could, one iota of that which is the closer approach to fellowship with Almighty God. When we say “May they rest in peace” it is not so much a hope for something not likely to happen but *a statement of fact*. In the Communion of Saints we pray in confidence for those we love, in this life, and in all the days to come.