

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at a Parish Requiem Mass  
November 16, 2019

+

It is a mysterious and solemn thought that we shall live forever. The physical remains of all the men and women and children born and unborn who have ever lived lie in the earth of our world. In the newspapers from time to time we see the findings of archeology, exhibits of ancient *mummies*, and even reports of disinterred graves, such as that of Saint John Henry Newman. It all supports that solemn proclamation of Holy Church on Ash Wednesday. "Remember, O man, that dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." And if Almighty God chooses to keep some mortal remains uncorrupt, that is His business. Nevertheless, we do not bury souls. And our faith leads us to the belief these souls are not disembodied spirits but indeed have personalities still expressed through physical bodies made perfect. These souls are somewhere in the confines of God universe.

So what happens when we die? Holy Church gives us the whole month of November to ponder the continued existence of holy souls. The Church teaches that departed souls belong to one of three classes. There are the saints of God who enjoy the full rewards of Heaven. There are also those souls, hopefully few, so utterly evil that they pass into a place God has set apart from His Presence. That is a place we commonly refer to as Hell. And the remainder, which may be by far the greater number, are those who did not die completely wedded to sin but who still need to be made ready for the life of Heaven.

We have been instructed by Our Lord not to believe death is a tragedy. To be sure, it is for us a sadness when we experience the final physical parting from the ways of a lifetime. But Blessed Jesus taught death is a transition and not an end. And Almighty God has provided we cannot fully enter the next life until we are done with the present life He has provided. Most of us are not done with this life when we die. And we cannot enter Heaven disfigured with imperfection. In Heaven we will fully realize our calling to bear the image of the son of God. That was our vocation all along. In one of our communion hymns we pray the Father will "Look on us as found in Him." In His Son Jesus.

Not only is imperfection impossible in Heaven, but we ourselves, when we know the truth fully, will want to be spotless when we come to enter the Presence of God. That process of leading to perfection is commonly called Purgatory, and

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at a Parish Requiem Mass  
November 16, 2019

+

refers to the realm of the Church Expectant. That part of God's Kingdom is where departed souls live in the assurance they are saved and expect one day to see God. No one ever flunks out of Purgatory! And Purgatory will not last forever. After the final judgment there will be only Heaven and Hell.

We can take comfort in knowing that our departed loved ones and all souls in the Church Expectant continue to enjoy the love of God and its divine benefits. They know even more clearly than we do here about themselves, that they are not yet ready for the Nearer Presence of the Almighty God. And Holy Church assures us our prayers help the progress of souls in the Church Expectant and that it is a work of mercy to pray for them, and especially to apply the merits of Christ's offering of Himself for their souls' benefit. That is why we pray for departed souls at every Mass.

Remember when he was mourning his dead son, King David said, "He cannot come to me, but I will go to him." We can expect to be united with our departed loved ones, and with the whole Body of Christ, in a more perfect way in the Church Expectant, and ultimately in God's good time, in the Church Triumphant. The November month of holy souls is bracketed by a glimpse of the Church Triumphant in our observance of All Saints' Day and The Solemnity of Christ the King. But even now our loved ones know that we have prayed for them here. In the Church Militant here on earth the bond between human beings is never complete. But in the next life all will be made complete and whole and perfect. Nearer to Christ, all imperfections are put aside. And the holy Mass is part of that next life nearer to Christ. It is "the place of meeting."