

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at a Requiem Mass
On All Souls' Day
November 2, 2020

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A corollary of the Catholic Faith is that everyone who has ever lived is still alive. Our belief souls are imperishable is a consequence of the fact Christ is Risen. Nothing is more plain in the New Testament than the ties which attach souls to a Living Lord. And this is not just for those who profess faith in Christ. For what else can it mean when the Church affirms that after He died, Christ raided the place of departed spirits and brought them with Him to Paradise?

Because Jesus Christ is beyond death, our ties to Him can only involve union with Divine immortality. Nothing like it has ever happened or can happen. Christ's Resurrection is unique and decisive. It can never be placed in a category with any other class of events. His Resurrection is the event which determines our view of everything in creation. And one of those things is our understanding of life after physical death.

Holy Scripture constantly teaches without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Nothing defiled shall enter Heaven. A thousand years before the Incarnation Moses was put on notice to remove his sandals when standing near the Burning Bush. St Paul, who was schooled in the faith of his fathers, but then in the mercies lavished upon him by Jesus Christ in a personal way, gives us the doctrine of Purgatory plainly enough. "If any man's work be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." (1 Corinthians 3:15)

St Paul is *not* describing the fate of unrepentant sinners. He is speaking about those who die in a state of grace, those who have reformed their character upon the foundations of Christ. St Paul tells us any defects and imperfections in a Christian soul and character must be removed before he can be admitted into Heaven. All the subsequent early Church Fathers have understood St Paul in these terms. There is no automatic bus pass to the heavenly realm.

In his instruction St Paul speaks of *fire*. And you will remember in the Lord's Parable of Dives and Lazarus the rich man is described as "tormented in this flame." But it is impossible for us to conceive how material fire could affect an immaterial spirit. There is no profit in such literal speculation. When we finally

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realize what a God we have, and how we have served Him, and what wounds we have inflicted upon Him and others by our pride and neglect, then the clear comparison of the Lord's mercy and our failings will be torment we can only inadequately describe as *burning flame*. St Paul says no more than that. He is giving us an analogy. "He himself shall be saved, yet so *as* by fire."

But souls in Purgatory have the complete assurance of final happiness. No one ever flunks out of Purgatory! And there must be so much more. Holy souls have a joy in the complete absence of sin and temptation. Their joy in the clear vision of God, and intimate fellowship with Him, is more than we can achieve or imagine here. The holy souls in the Church Expectant are called "the favorites of Jesus" for all these reasons.

So we pray for holy souls: our family and friends who have gone to God, and also for all departed souls. It just may be that your prayers are the final things needed in their cleansing. Pray for those who have no one to pray for them. Pray for those who may be very far from Heaven. Pray for those being cleansed from faults you yourself possess. In all these cases, prayer focuses the love of God where it is needed, just as this Mass for the Dead focuses all the merits of Christ's victory over sin and death for the happy repose of departed souls. Such efforts are never in vain in the Lord.