



One cannot help but notice the increasing threats posed to family life in our days. As these threats increase and become more direct, so too should our faithful embrace of the fullness of family life. Indeed, we ought to be on the lookout for even seemingly small ways that our families can be fortified with the very strength and love of Christ.

Happily, the month of November provides us with a reminder of one vital aspect of our families, and indeed of the Church. During the month of November, the Church recalls in a special way the souls in purgatory, the faithful departed. This solemn remembrance begins in noticeable fashion on November 2nd, when the Church celebrates the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. Throughout the month, the faithful are encouraged to pray in a special way for the holy souls and to offer sacrifices for their relief and deliverance.

However, the extra attention given to the dead during this month carries with it the risk of making a false impression. **Praying for the faithful departed is no seasonal devotion.** In fact, it is no mere devotion. **It is, and always has been, a central duty of the faithful here on earth to pray for the holy souls.** Why? Because, unseen though they are, they are our neighbors, and, we are commanded to love our neighbors.

It is sorrowful to acknowledge the decline in prayer on behalf of the holy souls in recent decades. This is due in part to the lack of teaching and preaching on the holy souls and our duties toward them. **A principal culprit too is the lack of consciousness of sin and the last things sowed within our mind and hearts by our materially-focused society. To saner generations, who lived- aided by their culture and society- in deep communion with the truths of faith, prayers for the souls in purgatory would have been an unquestioned and natural part of one's daily routine of prayer.** They hastened to have Masses offered for their deceased loved ones. The age-old prayer after meals is a prayer on behalf of the holy souls. Centuries ago, noble men and women did not think it excessive to found and endow whole monasteries and convents for the express purpose of praying for the deceased, especially of their own families, in perpetuity. The faithful were endowed with a lively understanding that the faithful departed need our prayers. Having finished their time here on earth, the holy souls are

no longer able to help themselves. This truth fueled the intense medieval devotion to the holy souls and, indeed, lies behind the inclusion of prayers on their behalf in the very heart of the liturgy from time immemorial.

Each of the Eucharistic Prayers, most notably the Roman Canon, includes a prayer for the deceased. At every single Mass, therefore, the priest prays publicly for the dead. And rightly so, for, at each Mass the whole Church, in all of its members, is present. More traditional catechesis spoke of three “groups,” or categories, which comprise the Church: the Church militant, the Church suffering, and the Church triumphant. Every member of the Body of Christ falls into one of these three categories. Those of us wayfarers making our way through this vale of tears comprise the Church militant. The saints in heaven- all of them- comprise the Church triumphant. We hope one day to be among their number. And, the souls undergoing purification in purgatory comprise the Church suffering. At least one consequence of this reality is clear. If we omit prayers for the deceased, we neglect the whole Christ because we overlook essential members of His Body- the faithful departed.

We rightly feel the impulse to pray for our brothers and sisters here on earth, especially those who are struck with various forms of misfortune. Our hearts reach out to them and they need our prayers. The holy souls in purgatory are in no less need of our prayers and are just as much our brother and sisters, our neighbors. Our prayers on their behalf fulfill the law of love in regard to the faithful departed. The very law of charity which binds all Christians to love our neighbors binds us to pray for the souls in purgatory. Love the souls in purgatory as Christ loves them.

Christ-like love moves us to pray especially for our own deceased family members. Such prayers are all the easier because our prayers are bourn along and encouraged by our love for them and our memories of them. **But, our prayers ought not to stop only with those whose memories are fresh for us.** We can and should pray for all of those unnamed ancestors- more or less close to us- whom we never had the good fortune of knowing. “Honor your father and mother,” not only here on earth, but even after they have left us. The expansion of our familial bonds of charity to embrace our deceased family members can only serve to secure our families all the more on the rock of Christ’s love.

November is a month when the Church prays especially for the faithful departed. God willing, each successive November’s reminder of our departed loved ones will not greet us as a stranger, but rather find us already great friends and benefactors to the faithful departed. Instead of being a reminder of prayers we forgot to say, each **November can be an encouragement to deepen our awareness of the holy souls in purgatory.** What is not visible often goes unnoticed. What goes unnoticed quickly becomes an object of neglect. In respect to us, the holy souls are unseen and sadly often unnoticed. **But they remain as much members of the same Body of Christ as each**

of us living, and ones in great need of our assistance. Our families, and indeed our Church, will be strengthened and blessed by God all the more as we are faithful in fulfilling **His command that we love our neighbor, especially those hidden from our sight only by the thin veil of immorality.**