



Thirty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time November 5, 2017 A

November—Month To Remember Deceased Loved Ones

During November, the last month of the Liturgical Year, the focus of the Gospel readings moves towards the end times.

Recently, a fellow Irishman shared with me the following piece, which I hope you will share with your friends.

Life Is Like A Journey On A Train

By Mark Anthony

**At birth we boarded the train and met our parents,
and we believe they will always travel on our side.**

**However, at some station
our parents will step down from the train,
leaving us on this journey alone.**

**As time goes by, other people will board the train;
and they will be significant, i.e., our siblings,
friends, children, and even the love of our life.**

**Many will step down
and leave a permanent vacuum.**

**Others will go so unnoticed that we don't
realize they vacated their seats.**

**This train ride will be full of joy, sorrow, fantasy,
expectations, hellos, goodbyes, and farewells.**

**Success consists of having a good relationship
with all passengers requiring that we give
the best of ourselves.**

**The mystery to everyone is:
we do not know at which station
we ourselves will step down.**

**So, we must live in the best way,
love, forgive, and offer the best of who we are.**

**It is important to do this because when the time
comes for us to step down and leave our seat empty,
we should leave behind beautiful memories for
those who will continue to travel on the train of life.**

Praying for the Souls in Purgatory

Unlike our Protestant brothers and sisters, Catholics believe that when we die, we do not go immediately to either Hell or Heaven. On our way to heaven, we may spend some time in Purgatory, where the soul is purified of all that is not of God, purified of all selfishness and of all worldly attachments. The pain of Purgatory is not that of burning fire, but rather the pain of purification. Perhaps the pain of Purgatory is somewhat like the pain a person experiences when trying to break free from some addiction.

St. Catherine of Siena who had visions of Purgatory said: *“The souls in Purgatory are happier than the souls on earth.”* That is surely good news. Commenting on this statement, Dominican theologian Fr. Thomas White writes:

Her reasoning is simple. In this life, while we might live in a state of grace, we are also subject to temptation and risk. It is possible to sin against the grace of God and to forfeit our salvation. Pilgrimage toward God in this world is characterized by hope and a kind of militancy, by which we aim with vigilance to be faithful to Christ and to arrive in heaven. Unlike people in this earthly state, however, the souls in purgatory can sin no more. They possess God once and for all. All the souls in purgatory therefore know with final certitude that they are inevitably bound for heaven, for the eternal vision of the essence of God. They cannot not be saved. They cannot forfeit the gifts of grace.

Fr. White further writes:

The state we call “purgatory” is one of purification and expectation. The Catholic Church claims that the souls of those who die in a state of grace, but who remain morally imperfect (with some sinful attachments and egoism), are prepared to see God face to face by gradual influxes of illumination and purifications of charity. This process is spiritually painful because each soul is given to perceive its defects more perfectly, and the will of each person is progressively freed from all egoism so as to love God for his own sake in immaculate

purity. This state is also liberating because this purification allows the souls in purgatory to anticipate heaven, progressively knowing and loving God with greater stability and purity. The soul becomes fully transparent to the grace of God, like a window washed clean from filth, in which sunlight shines through in sparkling clarity.

Catholic belief in Purgatory is based on Scripture, sacred tradition and reason

Purgatory—Final Purification (C 1030-1032, USC p. 154)

The *Catechism* (1030-1031) states: “*All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.*”

Speaking about Purgatory, St. John Paul II said: “*Those who live in this state of purification after death are not separated from God but are immersed in the love of Christ. Neither are they separated from the saints in heaven...nor from us on earth... We all remain united in the Mystical Body of Christ, and we can therefore offer up prayers and good works on behalf of our brothers and sisters in purgatory*” (General Audience, Aug. 4, 1999).

The Church’s belief in Purgatory is one not shared by most other Christians. They say it has no basis in Scripture. One does not find the word “purgatory” in the Bible. But neither will one find the words “incarnation” or “trinity”—two central doctrines of the Christian faith.

Catholic belief in Purgatory is rooted in *sacred tradition* and *reason*, and is implied in Scripture. Let’s look briefly at all three.

Scripture. Catholics believe that the reality we call Purgatory is hinted at in Scripture texts like 2Mac 12:42-46, 1Cor 3:11-15 and 1Pet 1:17. In the Maccabees text, people are urged to pray for the dead. Prayers for the dead only make sense if our prayers benefit the dead in some way. If the dead have reached their final destination, praying for them makes no sense. The Christian text speaks of a purifying fire that the saved will experience. Those early Christians believed that Christians who died in an imperfect state would undergo a purification process before entering heaven.

Sacred Tradition. For Catholics, Sacred Tradition—along with Sacred Scripture—is our source of Divine Revelation. Catholics believe that Sacred Tradition affirms their belief in Purgatory. Around 211AD, Tertullian wrote that Christians offered prayers and Mass for deceased loved ones. Sainly and scholarly pastors in the early church urged their people to pray for the dead. As stated earlier, such prayers would make no sense if souls had already reached their final destination.

Reason. The Book of Revelation (21:27) tells us that “*nothing unclean will enter heaven.*” Most of us will die with some imperfection, making us unworthy of heaven—hence, the need for final purification which the Church calls Purgatory. Purgatory is God’s way of purifying us from all sin, from the effects or wounds of sin and any attachment we may have to particular sins. Purgatory is God’s way of cleansing us of imperfections that would hinder us from fully enjoying heaven.

The pain and joy of purgatory. The pain of Purgatory will probably involve the sense of horror we will feel as we become fully aware of the ugliness of sin. The joy of Purgatory will be the happiness we will experience as we get closer to God. St. Catherine of Genoa, a fifteenth century mystic, wrote that the “fire” of Purgatory is God’s love “burning” the soul so that, at last, the soul is wholly aflame.

The Church urges us to pray for the souls in Purgatory. The Church prays for them at every Mass. The *Feast of All Souls* is celebrated on November 2 when we pray for *all the faithful departed*. In summary, we can say that Catholic teaching on Purgatory is twofold: (a) Purgatory exists, and (b) our prayers can help the souls in Purgatory move through their purification process.

It is important to remember our deceased loved ones in our prayers and Masses.

I recently viewed a very interesting DVD on *Purgatory*. In the middle of the videotape, there is a piece by a priest (a former Episcopalian) who had a tremendous devotion to the souls in Purgatory. The most amazing part of his witness is when he tells several times that souls who were released from Purgatory through his prayers, appeared to him and *thanked* him for his prayers. It is also a wonderful thing to often include in our prayers those souls who have no one to pray for them.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Sean