The Year of Mercy

Praying for the Living and the Dead

NOVEMBER
2016
Pray for the Living and Dead

“Again I tell you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 18:19

The month of November is a traditional time in the Church to remember and pray for those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. The month begins with the Feast of All Saints immediately followed by the Feast of All Souls. These two special days bring to mind the saints who lived among us and the saints who have embraced eternal life – loved ones who, in this life on earth, truly were our saints and now by their death have become beacons of hope for us still living. Our prayer is to one day share in eternal life and live with them among the saints in heaven.

This last consideration of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy—Praying for the Living and the Dead—brings to a close the Year of Mercy. It is a truly fitting theme as we explore not only our end in death, but the life that continues in resurrection. The previous six Corporal Works of Mercy are all found in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Early in the Church’s history, so great was the care and emotion surrounding the death of our loved ones, that a seventh was added “Bury the Dead.” With the subsequent addition of the Spiritual Works of Mercy, the seventh is paralleled with “Pray for the Living and the Dead.” The continuous thread for all of the Works of Mercy is our communion with the Risen Lord and one another. Our entire life as members of the Body of Christ is grounded in our “common-union” to Jesus Christ. This communion becomes more fully revealed by living the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy through our care, concern and love for each other.

In death, we painfully recognize that the soul has left the body and the person has truly died. However, the Jewish-Christian tradition has always concentrated on the totality of the person – body and soul. As a result, at the time of death we are moved to respect and care for the whole person we love by accepting that their soul has returned to the Lord. In turn, we show reverence and respect for the body by ritualizing and providing a fitting resting place. In doing so, we pray that our loved one will be welcomed into their heavenly reward and that those left behind, though touched by death, will courageously continue to live life to the fullest.

With great hope in the resurrection and leading to a reunion with our loved ones in heaven, we still grieve their passing. Even the greatest of saints faced sorrow and pain. Saint Ambrose is known to have shed tears at the funeral of his brother; Saint Augustine grieved at the death of his mother, Saint Monica and even our Lord, himself, wept at the death of his good friend Lazarus. When death comes to someone we love, it is part of our nature to mourn our loss. We do so by dressing them in their best and adorning them with flowers. We laugh and cry, remember and reminisce, and then we say goodbye, praying that all will be well for them and for us. The grave thus becomes our connection to the memories of life. We visit often and care for it always. The ritual of burial matters to us and to our view of life. For how we treat our dead says something about who we are.

The promise of resurrection points to our continued relationship with our deceased loved ones. With the great communion of saints we gather as one before the Lord. We remember each other in prayer, lifting up our struggles and joys to the notice of God. As we care for one another, God allows our prayers to be felt by those in heaven. Our prayers have a direct effect on those who have died and on those still living. They pour forth our love and lessen our pain. They spread our forgiveness and bring about our repentance. As we pray for those who have died, they in turn watch over and pray for us who live. This connection between the living and the dead is the very definition of the communion of saints. Receive their love and share it with others. Receive their forgiveness and be reconciled to one another. Receive their peace and bring to one another harmony and justice.

Perhaps the dead truly can still feel our love and forgiveness, our care and compassion. Mourn for what is lost and for what could have been. While time does heal, things are never the same. However, because of Jesus Christ and our belief in the resurrection, we remain connected to them forever and because of God’s love and mercy, His grace and compassion we can be assured of His promise of eternal communion. What is simply left…is our prayers for the dead and the living.

Continually pray for the living and the dead.
A Prayer for the Living and the Dead

"Why do you search for the Living One among the dead? He is not here; he has been raised up." Luke 24: 5-6

God of mercy and love,
we come before you with our prayer, remaining faithful to your commands and to the life of the Church.

Help us to persevere to commitments and promises we have made.
Give us the strength to live up to the vocation of our Baptism;
to the gifts given by the Spirit in Confirmation;
and to the grace received in the Eucharist.

To you, O God, we humbly remember and pray for our brothers and sisters in faith who have passed to their eternal reward.

We beg You, grant mercy upon them, and look kindly at their good deeds, so that in following the path they have prepared for us, we, too, may be admitted to everlasting life and share in eternal happiness.

Help us to place love and service to You before all else, and allow us to bring that selfless love to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

Universal Prayers

Praying for the Living and the Dead

That families and communities divided by suspicion and hurt will find their way to reconciliation, through God’s mercy...we pray to the Lord.

That our deceased relatives and friends may enjoy pardon and peace in God’s reign...we pray to the Lord.

That all who suffer physically, mentally or spiritually may be sustained by the faith and compassion of their families, friends, and fellow believers...we pray to the Lord.

That rejoicing in the mercy of God, we may extend mercy to those who seek reconciliation...we pray to the Lord.

That all those preceding us in death may know of the joys of eternal life...we pray to the Lord.

That all who mourn will be comforted by the assurance that their loved ones now see their God face to face...we pray to the Lord.

That all those seeking to share the mercy of God with others, may be blessed with courage and strength...we pray to the Lord.

Sunday Mass Themes and Homily Hints

November 6 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Fresh off the celebration and observance of All Saints Day and All Souls Day, the Corporal Work of Mercy to pray for the living and dead appropriately begins this last month of the Church Year and the Year of Mercy. The Gospel for this weekend highlights both the living and the dead. The Sadducees attempt to trap Jesus in what seems to be a rather ridiculous situation. Jesus makes clear that the identity and relationship we have with the living here and now will be much different than after the Resurrection. Life in heaven will transcend our understanding here on earth and as we hear, those who rise from the dead will be like angels.

November 13 – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

As the Church Year draws to a close, our Gospel reading speaks to us about the end of time. The Gospel passage from Luke tells of the end times that will include cosmic signs and natural disasters. Jesus repeats that his Kingdom is not of this earth and that only God has a hand in matters of life and death. We take comfort in knowing that those who persevere and remain faithful to the message of Christ will be saved by God.

November 20 – Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Today’s feast day not only points to the end of the Church year, celebrating Christ as King of all creation, but also to the conclusion of the mission of Christ here on earth. However, we have been baptized to continue His mission in the world today. We pray for all of our brothers and sisters in faith as we journey together knowing that Jesus has promised us a place with Him in heaven after we complete our earthly journey. We end the Church Year and this Year of Mercy knowing that His death on the cross connects us with those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. We end this month just as we began it!
Moments of Mercy...

PRAYING FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

“Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours.”  Mark 11:24

...for the Parish

— In the Universal Prayer, include the names of recently deceased parishioners and relatives of parishioners.
— At meetings of parish organizations and committees, allow time to pray for those who are most in need.
— Plan a Memorial Mass each year, possibly in November and invite relatives and friends of those who have died during the past year.
— Begin a prayer chain or publicize links to existing prayer chains.
— Encourage prayers for special groups in the parish: Confirmation Candidates, those preparing for First Eucharist, parents preparing for the Baptism of their children, those in R.C.I.A., etc.
— Place a book near the entrance to the worship space for parishioners to write their prayer intentions. During November, place another book in which they may record the names of those who have died.

... for School or Religious Education

— Depending upon the level of maturity and understanding, encourage children to pray for those whose stories they have heard about in the news.
— Ask children to compose original prayers on handmade cards to be given to others.
— Make certain that children know that their prayers will be answered, but perhaps not in the way that they expected.

...for the Family

— Celebrate family events with prayer and blessing: birthdays, graduation, first day of school, animals on the Memorial of St. Francis, Advent wreath, Christmas tree and crèche, newly planted spring gardens, and other special occasions. Bring home water from your church’s Baptismal font to use in these blessings.
— In family prayers at mealtime and bedtime, always include intentions for others.

...for Individuals

— Walk a Labyrinth, intentionally praying for certain people, situations, conditions or circumstances. To find a Labyrinth in your area go to: www.labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth.
— Seek out and take part in various forms of prayer -- Taizé, Centering Prayer, Walking Meditation, Liturgy of the Hours.
— Join a prayer group.
— Make your prayers be those of praise as well as petition, thanksgiving as well as intercession, blessing as well as supplication.