

November – Month of the Dead

In the Catholic Church, the whole month of November is devoted to the deceased, and specifically dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The whole Church is divided into 3 distinct categories: the Church Triumphant (those deceased who are saints in heaven), the Church Militant (the faithful still alive here on earth), and the Church Suffering (The Holy Souls or Faithful Departed who await the purification of their souls before joining the saints in heaven for all eternity). We just celebrated their two big feast days, All Saints and All Souls. While we often pray **to** the saints for their help and intercession, all of November is focused on praying **for** the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

The Church has always taught us to pray for those who have gone into eternity. Even in the Old Testament prayers and alms were offered for the souls of the dead by those who thought "well and religiously concerning the resurrection." (2 Maccabees)

So, how many people are we praying for? It's estimated there have been over 100 billion human births on earth since man entered the scene. About 7 billion of them are alive today. Researchers suggest the ratio of dead persons to live ones is 15:1.⁽¹⁾ So nearly 100 billion souls have passed to heaven, hell or purgatory. November is dedicated to prayers for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, and it's not difficult to imagine there are more than a few there.

The Church teaches us the Holy Souls in purgatory died in the mercy of God, and so they are called "holy." However, because they still had attachment to sin at the time of their death, they must undergo the spiritual purification of their souls before they are able to fully love God with their whole heart, mind, and soul for all eternity. As they are nevertheless part of the communion of saints, they depend upon us to help ease their suffering and quickly advance them through their purification so that they can join the saints in heaven. Those in purgatory cannot pray for themselves, this is why they are also called "poor." They can no longer merit anything for themselves and rely entirely on living souls to pray and make sacrifices on their behalf.⁽²⁾

What can we do? This week (Nov. 1-8) we have a special opportunity for indulgences for specific souls in purgatory. There are a few conditions such as visiting a cemetery, receiving the Eucharist, going to confession and praying. In addition, during the rest of the month take advantage of Eucharistic Adoration, Mass, the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, reading Scripture and saying prayers directed towards assisting deceased family, friends and others. All of these can accelerate a person's advancement into Heaven.⁽³⁾

Let me close with a couple of saints' quotes and a couple of appropriate prayers:

"When we pray for the souls in Purgatory we will always get something back." St. Padre Pio

"Consider then...the magnitude of these sufferings which the souls in Purgatory endure; and the means which we have of mitigating them: our prayers, our good works, and, above all, the holy sacrifice of the Mass." – Saint John Vianney

The Prayer of St. Gertrude:

Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Most Precious Blood of Thy Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the masses said throughout the world today, for all the holy souls in purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, those in my own home and within my family. Amen.

The Prayer of Eternal Rest:

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-16870579>

² https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/overviews/months/11_1.cfm

³ <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/joseph-pronechen/purgatory-souls-are-sending-their-november-sos>

