

Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed: I Will Reject No One who Comes to Me. (John 6:37)

One of the beautiful aspects of the Catholic Church is the way that our history is kept alive in the prayers of the community. The Memorial of All Souls is part of this history, and is still a living reality in our Church. The commemoration goes back to the eleventh century with a decree of St. Odilo of Cluny that the monks of the Cluny Abbey were to spend a day in prayer for the dearly departed. Shortly after this the universal Church celebrated this day of prayer for all the faithful who died yet were not recognized as saints. In the Fourteenth Century the memorial was moved to November 2nd to link it with the Feast of All Saints on November 1st. The idea is that just as the saints are holy with God in heaven, the souls of the faithful departed who were not in heaven were to a lesser degree holy as they prepared for heaven. Dante Alighieri in the *Second Book of the Divine Comedy, The Purgatorio*, presents the souls in purgatory as holding themselves back from climbing the mountain of God until they are able to accept the fulness of his love. The prayers of their loved ones still on earth opened them up to God's love.

That's the history, now the living reality. One of our greatest fears is the fear of rejection, not just fear of being rejected by our society or community, but a far deeper fear of rejection. To some extent or other we all fear being rejected by God. We are all painfully aware of our human limitations and our personal sins. When our physical lives come to an end, we fear that God will reject us. "After all," we think, "why would God want someone who has lied, cheated, taken advantage of others, broken vows, etc, to be in the same place as his mother, Mary, or St. John Paul II, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. Ignatius of Antioch and all those saints we celebrated yesterday. We not only fear that we will be rejected by God, we understand His reasons for doing so.

The thing is we forget that God's love and compassion is infinitely deeper than ours. He says in the *Book of Wisdom*, "I reject no one who comes to me." God's mercy and compassion is far greater than man's.

King David knew this. Do you remember the story at the end of the *Second Book of Samuel* when God told David to choose a punishment. What had happened is that David had won many battles and was feeling pretty good about himself as King. So he decided to call a census of Israel to know how many troops he could muster for further wars. Up to this point David had trusted in God to fight for Israel. Now, by numbering the troops, he was saying that he could do well with his own strength. It was a sin similar to that of Adam and Eve who felt they didn't need God. The prophet Gad called David out, and David repented. The prophet then told David that God offered him to choose one of three punishments: three years of famine, which would necessitate his people begging food from neighboring countries, to flee from his enemy for three months, or three days of pestilence. David chose the pestilence because he knew that it would be entirely in God's hands. David said, "Let me trust in the compassion of God rather than that of men."

God loves us too much to reject us when we come to him. Perhaps we might not be ready yet to endure the full blast of his love, as Dante so beautifully portrayed in the *Purgatorio*. We might need purgatory to cleanse ourselves of the results of our sins, the refusal to grow more loving in various aspects of our lives. But the Lord does not reject those who come to him. A wise priest once said to me, "I not only believe in purgatory; I'm counting on it."

The power of prayer is far greater, infinitely greater than we could ever imagine. Often when we pray we call on the strength of the Almighty One to perform an action beyond our capabilities, but not beyond His. Today we pray that the Lord heal the wounds caused by the sins of all who are not yet ready to enter into the fulness of His presence. That's what we are doing when we pray for the souls in purgatory. May they be healed. May any part of their lives that have been closed to Love be completely open to the presence of God.

That is why we pray for our deceased parents, spouses, children, relatives, and friends. We know that they were good people. But we also know that they were people. We want them to be capable of receiving the full blast of God's love, so we pray for them. We celebrate funeral Masses, for that is the prayer of Jesus on the Cross for the deceased. We have additional Masses said for our loved ones throughout the year. We remember them in our daily prayers. And we pray for them particularly on today, All Souls Day, and throughout the month of November.

We are all united in the Community of the Church. We are united to the saints in their triumph. We are united with the souls in purgatory in their preparation for triumph. And the saints and souls in purgatory are united with us in our efforts to make Christ a reality in our world.

"I will reject no one who comes to me." (John 6:37). We trust in the God who loves us to care for us and our loved ones in life and in death. And so we pray, "May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace."