

**Mass for the 75th Anniversary of the EIU Newman Catholic Center  
The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls)  
November 1, 2014**

**EIU Newman Catholic Center  
Charleston, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Newman Catholic Center here at Eastern Illinois University. For three quarters of a century, the Catholic faith has been nourished on this campus and we gather to give thanks to God for the blessings received throughout those years, blessings which are the foundation for the vibrant Catholic community that exists today here at Eastern.

The liturgical context for our celebration this evening is a rather unique one. On the calendar, the date is November 1 which is day on which we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. But since tomorrow, November 2, is a Sunday, the prayers and readings for this Mass are for the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, more commonly known as All Souls Day. This unique situation, as opposed to being a source of confusion, is actually a wonderful opportunity to experience the richness of

what these two days celebrate regarding our belief about what happens to us when we reach the end of our earthly lives.

In our first reading from the Book of Wisdom, we encounter the contrast that exists between a purely human understanding of death and one based on faith. From physical appearances alone, one might say about the dead: “[t]hey seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction” (Wisdom 3:2-3a). To many, death makes no sense and leaves us with a sense of despair and uncertainty. From the perspective of faith, however, we are able to say that “[t]he souls of the just are in the hand of God” and that “they are in peace” (Wisdom 3:1, 3b).

Our faith reminds us that death is not the end of our story. From the moment that He created humanity, God desired that we should be with Him for eternity. Even after Adam and Eve turned away from God in the garden, thus introducing death into the world, the Lord did not abandon that desire. In order to make this eternal union with Him possible once again, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to restore that link that had been lost. Through His death and Resurrection, He has reconciled us

to Him and has given us the opportunity to share that destiny of eternal glory that He intended from the beginning.

Although this supreme act of love was sufficient to save all of humanity, it does not cancel out our free will to either accept or reject this great gift. From this comes our belief that when our earthly life comes to an end, it will continue for eternity either with God or without Him. All Saints Day and All Souls Day direct our attention to the former, for those who have died in the grace of Christ remain united with us in that same bond of His love. Those who freely choose to explicitly reject this gift have freely chosen to be separated from Christ for eternity and thus, separated from those who are united to Him.

All Saints Day is a day in which we celebrate all of those souls who are now enjoying the fullness of life in Heaven among the saints. While the Church has a list of those officially recognized as being in Heaven, we believe with great hope that there are countless others who have arrived at the heavenly banquet, being totally free from any imperfection or impurity. We rejoice for we are encouraged by their example of a life well-lived and we are aided by their prayers as we strive to join them when our pilgrimage is complete.

All Souls Day is closely related. On this day, we celebrate those who have freely chosen to spend eternity with Christ and are united with Him in the bond of His love at the time of their death, but who still bear some of the remnants of their previous sins. In His rich mercy and His great desire to extend His victory to those who die in this way, God has made possible a state whereby one is purified of these traces of sin so as to be worthy to join the company of saints totally cleansed of any residue that may have been clinging to them from their long and difficult journey of life.

In this state of Purgatory, the faithful departed depend on our prayers and sacrifices to aid them in this process, and so we gladly offer our prayers for them in various ways individually and collectively, as we do today on All Souls Day. It is an unfortunate mistake that many people in our culture today dismiss this important practice of our faith. Many would like to just assume that their loved ones have gone to Heaven and therefore see no need to pray for the repose of their souls. To withhold those prayers is in no way a lack of hope on our part, but rather, an expression of true love for them and a firm trust in God's infinite mercy.

We can see then, the richness of these two celebrations which remind us of how intimately connected we are to those who have gone before us

marked with the sign of faith. We benefit immensely from our connection with the saints in Heaven and we have the great privilege of benefitting those who are guaranteed to be in Heaven, but who require some purification before being fully admitted to the Kingdom.

Our unique liturgical celebration today highlighting these two important feast days enriches our celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Newman Catholic Center tonight by giving deeper meaning to the theme chosen for this event: “Remembering our past, celebrating our present, ensuring our future.”

We remember our past by acknowledging the many sacrifices and good works undertaken by so many who have gone before us and have provided for the spiritual fruits that you enjoy on a regular basis here at this Newman Center. Our remembrance would be incomplete if we did not call to mind the souls of those people who have entered into their eternal rest. For those who may be in Heaven, we implore their intercession as we move forward in the sure and certain hope of joining them one day. For those who require some assistance in Purgatory, we gladly offer our prayers for them in gratitude for their contributions,

praying that they may soon receive their full inheritance in the Lord's house.

We celebrate our present, recognizing the many ways in which the Holy Spirit is active in stirring the hearts of the students here who seek to carry on the strong tradition of the Catholic faith on this campus. The strong dedication to the Catholic faith keeps all of you united with one another and the rest of the Church, helping you to realize the diversity and unity that exists among yourselves, the diocese, and the Universal Church both here on earth and outside of time in Purgatory and Heaven.

In a particular way, there is much to celebrate in the present in the number of men who have been affiliated in some way with the Newman Center who are now studying for the priesthood in the seminary. This, as Pope Benedict XVI said, is a hallmark of vitality<sup>1</sup> for this community.

Finally, we gather with a mind toward ensuring our future. Beyond the material and financial elements that make the continuation of this Newman Center possible, we see how the Catholic faith here is preparing many students not just to be faith-filled members of society and the Church, but it is also preparing them to be among the elect in the communion of saints.

The Newman Center offers many opportunities for you to say 'yes' to Christ during these formative years when so many of your peers choose to exercise their so-called freedom and say 'no' to Christ and His Church. Your formation in the Gospel-centered way of life *now* is setting you on a path that, we pray, will culminate with each of you hearing those welcome words after a life dedicated to following the Lord: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. ...Come, share your master's joy" (Matthew 25:21).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations.