

**Homily for All Souls Day Mass at Marian University
The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls)
November 2, 2015**

**Marian University
Indianapolis, IN**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in just over a month, the Church throughout the world will begin her observance of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. The calling of this year by Pope Francis is the answer to the question “about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy.”¹ He expressed that it is hoped that this coming year will bring about a “spiritual conversion” during which the faithful will find “the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God, with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time.”²

One of the ways in which the Holy Father is inviting us to live this Jubilee Year of Mercy fruitfully is by reflecting on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as “a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty.”³ The pope reminds the Church of the serious obligation that we have in being instruments of mercy when he

says of these works of mercy that “[w]e cannot escape the Lord’s words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged.”⁴

Our celebration today of All Souls Day draws our attention to one of those works of mercy, namely praying for the dead. This practice of praying for the souls in Purgatory is often overlooked and undervalued when compared to the other works of mercy which focus on the least among us on this earth. One of the reasons for that is the misunderstanding of death.

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.

If our relationship with Jesus is meant to continue after earthly death, the same is true of our relationship with all of the other members of the Body of Christ. As Catholics, our relationship with Jesus is not purely individual. It is corporate. We encounter Him in the context of our membership in the Church, united with one another in the bond of our common faith.

The bond that unites us is more powerful than death and it continues after we die, which requires that we have faith to see beyond what seems to be the end. Our praying for the dead is an expression of our belief in the power of that bond and how we remain united with the faithful both living and dead.

Just yesterday, we celebrated All Saints Day, a day on which we call to mind those souls who, after dying, have received their reward in Heaven. They remain united to us by interceding for us before the throne of God as we make our way through this pilgrimage of life on our way to Heaven.

Today, 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 offer prayers for the dead 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.

As we go through this month of November dedicated to the Poor Souls in Purgatory, let us offer many prayers and sacrifices for those who await their entrance into Heaven. May be we especially mindful of the profound assistance offered to those souls each time we come to Mass. May our faithful observance of this practice be a good preparation to open our hearts to more fruitfully celebrate the upcoming Year of Mercy, during which we will have a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the gift of God's mercy to us and the privilege we have of sharing that mercy with others, both the living and the dead.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, Homily for Penance Service at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, 13 March 2015.

² *ibid.*

³ Pope Francis, *Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, 11 April 2015.

⁴ *ibid.*