

*November*  
*A Time to Remember (1)*

The month of November is a time when Catholics remember and pray for the faithful departed. And so throughout this month I will be writing a series of essays on death, eternal life, and the funeral liturgy that so beautifully expresses our Catholic belief in the resurrection of the dead. This month begins with two important feasts: (1) the Feast of All Saints that we celebrate this Sunday, and (2) the Feast of All Souls that we celebrate on Monday.

In the Creed that we recite every Sunday, we profess that we believe in “one, *holy*, Catholic Church.” The holiness of the Church is not the result of our own effort or goodness but a gracious gift from God. God makes the Church holy by consecrating and sanctifying her through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. This is why St. Paul regularly addresses the recipients of his letters as “the holy ones,” or “the saints.” Every member of the Church is “holy” and is a “saint” because God has chosen and consecrated us to be members of the Church through the death and resurrection of his Son.

To be sure, not all of us live as the saints and holy ones God has called us to be. But there have been, there are, and there will always be members of the Church who faithfully live their vocation to holiness. We celebrate the feast days of many of these saints throughout the year, for example, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Catherine, St. Margaret Mary, etc. These are the great saints we know about. But in addition to these great saints there is a vast company of other saints, faithful Christians who have responded to God’s call to holiness. These are the people we celebrate today. I think of those mothers and fathers who have given so generously of themselves in raising a family. I think of the unmarried men and women who devoted their lives to others. There is no lack of saints because God has communicated the holiness of Jesus Christ to us, and many have and continue to respond to that grace.

The feast of All Saints reminds us of what the Second Vatican Council calls the “universal call to holiness.” It reminds us that “holiness” is the vocation of every Christian without exception. Since God has already sanctified us in Christ, all of us are called to be saints. This is what we celebrate today.

Tomorrow we celebrate the Feast of All Souls, a day on which we pray for the faithful departed who are still in the process of being purified before entering into the presence of the All Holy God. We pray for the souls in Purgatory. That there should be such a moment of purification makes perfect sense. How else could we—sinners that we are—stand in the presence of God who is Holy? What the moment of purification is, we will not fully know until we experience it. But what

we do know is that we can and should pray for the dead, not only to remember them but to assist them by our prayers in their final moment of purgation before they stand in the presence of the All Holy God with the vast chorus of saints we celebrate today.

Today we remember the saints that have gone before us and our vocation to holiness. Tomorrow we pray for our loved ones and all the faithfully departed, assisting them by our prayers, so that they may join the vast company of saints.

*Father Matera*