

All Souls' Day

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

Pastor – Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Victoria, BC, Canada

When St. Monica, mother of St. Augustine, knew that she was at the end of her life, she wanted to return to her home country, Africa. And so, St. Augustine agreed to accompany his mother on her journey to Africa. But their journey was short-lived. St. Monica fell sick in Ostia, and soon felt that death was approaching. "It is here that you will bury your mother," she told Augustine calmly. At peace with God's will, she had but a single and last request for her son. "The one thing I ask of you is that you remember me at the Altar of the Lord." This was her only request to St. Augustine. And, today we remember all our beloved departed brothers and sisters at the Altar of God.

In the Second Reading from the Book of Revelation, we are all called to a new heaven and a new earth. Today, we celebrate the memorial of all the departed souls who now have new lives in the new heaven and new earth: an everlasting life with Jesus. In his work, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, remembering his tears over his mother's expiration, St. Augustine humbly admitted: "May I be pardoned for the tears I then shed, for her death should not be mourned; it was only the entrance to true life." This is reflected in 1st Thessalonians 4:13-14:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

We know death is a certainty in everyone's lives. Even Shakespeare acknowledged that death is an unavoidable end. As Christians, though, we have a great hope: that we are entering into a new life in Jesus.



From ancient times, praying for the dead has been part of Christianity. It is an act of Christian charity. St. Augustine reaffirmed the significance of the offering of prayers for the dead when he stated that: “It cannot be doubted that the prayers of the Church, the Holy Sacrifice, and alms distributed for the departed, relieve those holy souls [in Purgatory], and move God to treat them with more clemency than their sins deserve. It is the universal practice of the Church, a practice which she observes as having received it from her forefathers - that is to say, the holy Apostles.” With this, St. Augustine clarified offering prayers for the dead; which is a way of expressing love towards them through offering continued prayers and spiritual assistance.

And, today, for All Souls' Day, we pray for them and are united with them in the mystical Body of Christ. The theological underpinning of the feast is in the acknowledgement of human frailty, and is an invitation to live a saintly life to reach the new heaven and new earth.