From the Divine Mercy Pastorate Spiritual Committee

Two Days, One Family: All Saints' and All Souls'

Up until now, we've been building our foundation of prayer together. We started by exploring what prayer is: a relationship with God that looks different for each of us, shaped by our own hearts and circumstances. We then asked why we pray, and found that it's ultimately about drawing closer to Him, not checking a box. Most recently, we looked at how to pray, uncovering useful ingredients that give us a way to actually follow through with praying. This month, let's take that foundation and apply it to two specific days the Church sets aside for us to pray in a particular way: All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day.

Before we talk about those special days, let's start with what it means to be a saint. The word has two senses: lowercase "s" saint, anyone in heaven, known or unknown, most of them ordinary people who died in friendship with God; and capital "S" Saint, someone the Church has formally declared, through canonization, to be in heaven with enough certainty for the whole Church to ask for their prayers. Canonization doesn't make someone a saint; it recognizes one.

Also, the Church is understood in three "states," one family spanning death itself: the Church Militant (us, alive on earth), the Church Suffering (souls in purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (saints in heaven). "Militant" doesn't mean violent; it means still in the fight, still striving toward holiness, still facing temptation, still capable of both sin and growth. The Church Suffering are those who died in God's friendship but aren't fully purified yet; "Suffering" here means purification, not punishment, a final cleansing of the soul before one can be fully with God. The Church Triumphant are the ones who've made it, fully united with God, no longer struggling.

All Saints' Day, which falls on November 1, honors everyone already in heaven, whether canonized Saints or the countless "unknown saints" who aren't formally recognized. All Souls' Day, which follows on November 2, is officially the "Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed," a day when the universal Church prays for all those in purgatory, souls who were likely much like us. Both trace back centuries: All Saints' Day to the third century, All Souls' Day to the eleventh.

While we pray for the dead and ask for the intercession of the saints all year round, on these two specific days the Church asks something particular of us, the Church Militant: on All Saints' Day, we celebrate the Church Triumphant, those already with God, and on All Souls' Day, we pray for the Church Suffering, the souls being purified in purgatory. We pray because we believe that death doesn't end a relationship. Those who have died are still part of God's family, and we can still love them and pray for them, just as they can pray for us. Most of us are not perfect when we die, but God's mercy provides for this: a final cleansing of the soul before we can fully be with Him, and prayers help that along. One common prayer we can use for them is the "Eternal Rest" prayer (Requiem aeternam): "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen."

Leaning into a couple of virtues, faith empowers us to trust what we cannot see: that the departed are alive in Christ and that our prayers help them. Perseverance keeps them in our prayers long after the funeral is over, following the example of the saints, who kept going through doubt and suffering. Together, these two days show us that prayer is never a solitary act, but a conversation shared across the whole family of God, in heaven, in purgatory, and on earth, a truth the Church calls the Communion of Saints.

So this November 1 and 2, let's make room for that prayer. Ask a saint to pray for you, whether a favorite or an unknown one. Then pray the Eternal Rest prayer for someone you love who has died, or for a soul no one else may remember. It doesn't need to be long or polished. Simply take a moment and pray.

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