

2nd November 2020, All Souls Day

Wisdom 3:1-9, Ps 23, Matthew 11:25-30

Today is about praying for the dead; those who have gone before us and are in that state which the Church calls “purgatory”. Whereas death marks the end of our earthly lives, the Catechism explains that death is a part of the human condition, but it is transformed by Jesus Christ (CCC 1009). Because of Jesus’ own Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension, Christian death has a positive meaning because the Christian has already died with Christ in Baptism (Rom 6:3). Death therefore means that that union with Christ which was forged in Baptism is fulfilled and we can definitively be united with Christ for all eternity (CCC 1010).

However, most of us die still with some imperfections on our souls, some unforgiven sin or habits not corrected, and so we need to undergo purification in order to achieve that perfect holiness required to share in God’s eternal glory. This is what “purgatory” is, when we are cleansed of all that is not of God in us and made perfectly holy. It is only by the grace of Christ that we can be purified as after the end of our earthly life, and that is why it is so important to pray for those who have died.

Imagine you have a white towel that is a few years old and the whiteness has lost its brilliance. It may be perfectly “clean” but a bit on the grey side. Then compare it to a brand new bleached white towel, and the difference is obvious. Most of us leave this world a bit on the grey side and so need to become as white as Christ was in His Transfiguration.

The first reading from the Book of Wisdom is wonderfully comforting, assuring us that purging after death is temporary. The beautiful Psalm (23) reminds us that we are totally in the care of Christ who is the Good Shepherd who has prepared a banquet for us. Banquets in Sacred Scriptures always point to the eternal feast in heaven in the presence of all the angels and saints together with the most Blessed Trinity.

Jesus’ care for each one of us is confirmed in the Gospel, where He bids us lay all our burdens and worries on Him. This includes the burden of worry for those who have gone before us.

✠ Eternal rest give unto them O Lord, and may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

(Carol Ann Harnett)