

# NOVEMBER 12, 2023: 32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



The month of November has become a month for remembering those who have died. A major reason for this is the celebration of All Souls Day on November 2nd. We use this day to commemorate those who have gone before us and we offer our prayers for their souls. Praying for the dead is an ancient practice of the Church, and it comes forth from our belief in the state of purgatory. If we believe that a person is in heaven, there really is no reason to pray for them. The reason we offer Masses for the dead is to aid them as they transition from purgatory to heaven. One may ask, how do our prayers aid them? The answer is simple: because it is an act of charity. Love by its very nature is a source of grace in the lives of others.

True love always brings one into the very presence of God, and we receive grace by being in the presence of God. Therefore, prayers directed in love for another create the opportunity for them to receive the grace of God which leads to spiritual healing.

People usually ask me about purgatory with some sense of apprehension. The natural questions are: what is purgatory? and, why would it be necessary? These are not simple questions to answer and so I cannot go into them in detail here, but I think I can offer some understanding with a few simple explanations.

The Church teaches that a purgative state may be necessary after death. It does not say that everyone must experience purgatory. (Though I believe that most do 😊) The necessity for most people comes from the reality of the effects of sin on our lives. Let me give a simple analogy. Every choice we make is like throwing a rock into a still pond. And, when you do so you always create ripples. When we choose to sin, which is making a choice contrary to the will of God, the ripples created always have negative consequences. In confession, God forgives our sins; He removes the rocks from our soul so that the sin is literally taken away. But the ripples we created from that choice(s) remain, which is called the temporal effect of sin. In our lives those ripples can continue to impact our lives and prevent us from completely accepting the love of God. When we die, we may not be ready then to accept God's love completely but that is our true desire, and so God gives us purgatory in order to prepare us for the joy of heaven. God gives us the time we need to be fully healed.

How does purgatory work to make this happen? Another analogy may be helpful for understanding. It is common at the end of a marathon race for the runner to keep running, and at times in circles. The purpose for one to continue running is to stop the person's body from going into spasms: after running 26 miles the muscles of the body build up lactic acid. If the person simply stops running, the body would react in a negative way. Running in circles allows the lactic acid to slowly dissipate and then the person has no real issues. (Except, of course, exhaustion from running 26 miles. 😊) Our lives are like a marathon race and through our sinful choices we build up lactic acid (temporal effect of sin), and purgatory is our chance to run in a circle as we slowly burn it off. We have already run the race, but we need that little extra time to be completely ready to stop and enter into eternity to praise and worship God.

Purgatory is *not* a place to fear. It is not a place where we need to be concerned about what is going to happen to the person. It is simply a way station on our journey to heaven that gives us the necessary focus on loving God as completely as we should. Therefore, let us offer our prayers for all the poor souls in purgatory, and in a special way for those who have no one to pray for them. Let us spend our lives in love and offer that love as a means of grace to help those who have gone before us and await that blessed day of seeing our God face to face. Let us pray for them each day that they may soon know that moment when God will wipe every tear from their eyes and see our God as He truly is.

I do try to pray every day for the dead and the prayer I pray is this: Father in heaven, you who are mercy and compassion itself, I beg you, I beseech you, I implore you, to pour forth your mercy and compassion upon those for whom I have prayed. Through the intercession of your Son, by the merits of his death and resurrection, may they be cleansed by his blood of all temporal effects of sin and come to share in the light, happiness, and peace of your eternal banquet. And I ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

However you may choose to pray for those who have gone before you, just remember that praying for the dead is your preparation for your own journey into eternity.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call/text me at (978) 254-0560.  
If you prefer to email, please visit <https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,  
Fr. Brian

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian", with a stylized flourish at the end.