



# Holy Souls: How Much Do You Know?

## ANSWER KEY

### 1. What is Halloween really all about?

The term *Halloween* comes from *All Hallows' Eve*. A 'hallow' is a saint, and therefore this celebration is the anticipation of All Saints' Day (also known historically as *Hallowmas*), which is always celebrated on November 1<sup>st</sup>. The purpose of **All Hallows' Eve** is to prepare ourselves for All Saints' Day (much in the way that Christmas Eve is meant to help us, in a special way, prepare for Christmas). You can help prepare yourself in several ways: prayer, spiritual devotions, and attending a prayer vigil held at your local parish or Catholic cemetery (and celebrating with a bit of free candy doesn't hurt too). But what are we preparing for? What is All Saints' Day really all about?

**All Saints' Day** is a joyful celebration in honour of all the saints, known and unknown. We believe there is a prayerful spiritual bond between those in heaven and those living on earth. You can celebrate this beautiful day by attending Mass, reconnecting with one or two of your favorite saints in prayer, learning about a new saint, and also by the regular way we celebrate – with good food and loving relationships all around you!

All Saints' Day is always followed by **All Souls' Day**, also known as *The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed* (the third day of the Hallowtide Triduum), which is November 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is a day of prayer for those who have died. Catholics are encouraged to visit one of their Catholic cemeteries to pray for the faithful departed, to remember them, and to give thanks. An All Souls' Day Mass is often celebrated at your local parish or Catholic cemetery.

### 2. Are ghosts real?

This is a difficult and mysterious question to answer, and the Catholic Church has not articulated a definitive position on it, but Fr. Gabriele Amorth, who was the full-time exorcist of the Diocese of Rome for over thirty years, wrote this:

"There are no good spirits other than angels; there are no evil spirits other than demons. . . . God allows a [human] soul to return to earth only in very rare, exceptional cases, but we recognize that this subject is still full of unknowns."<sup>1</sup>

Several of these exceptional cases have been documented, many of which appear in the lives of the saints. The life and works of St. Nicholas of Tolentino, for example, who is the patron saint of Holy Souls, provides several examples, such as the following: "On a particular Saturday night as Nicholas lay down trying to sleep he heard the voice of Fra Pellegrino of Osimo, a deceased friar whom he had known personally. The friar revealed to Nicholas that he was in purgatory and he begged Nicholas to offer Mass and pray for his soul and the many other Holy Souls to be set free. For a whole week Nicholas every day followed this request and was rewarded with a second vision of Fra Pellegrino who gave thanks and assured Nicholas that a great deal of souls were now enjoying the heavenly presence of God through his prayers."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. What is Purgatory?

Imagine you've skipped across a tar field to arrive on the other side, where Jesus in all His love and mercy and goodness is awaiting you with open arms. When you get there, however, you find that your clothes are filthy and you desire to be made clean before embracing Beauty himself. The condition in which you are purged of this filth (i.e., the stain of sin) is called Purgatory. It involves great suffering because burning shame and deep remorse are painful; when Peter betrayed Jesus, the Lord turned and met his gaze, and Peter "went out and began to weep bitterly" (Luke 23: 60-62). However,

<sup>1</sup> Amorth, G. (1999). *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Kirkham, J. (2014). *The Holy Souls*. Retrieved from <http://www.mysticsofthechurch.com/2014/02/the-holy-souls-of-purgatory.html>

Purgatory should most of all be understood as a profound expression of God's love; it is His way of making it possible for us to be with Him "as the pure and unstained souls He had meant us to be from the beginning"<sup>3</sup>, allowing us to become truly ourselves. Therefore, for the souls in Purgatory, a deep-rooted joy pervades all of their suffering – it is the joy of knowing that they are securely destined for Heaven.

#### 4. What is an indulgence?

If you were to fall and tear a ligament or tendon in your knee, your body would not be able to heal itself; you may need a surgeon to fix it, and even then you would need physiotherapy in the months that followed because the knee would be weak and prone to future injury. In a similar way, every time we fall spiritually (every time we sin) there is also a spiritual consequence – damage to the soul that leaves the soul weak in this area and prone to future sinning – damage that needs to be healed. This is because every sin, even little ones, and even ones that have been forgiven through confession, indicate an unhealthy attachment to something other than God, and this must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory (CCC, n. 1472). The Church recognizes our need in this area, and so lovingly offers us pathways to speedily purify that spiritual consequence here on earth, called *indulgences*. We can obtain an indulgence for ourselves, or on behalf of the souls in Purgatory (which is made possible through the *communion of saints*).

During the season of Holy Souls, we can obtain a full indulgence (a.k.a., a *plenary* indulgence) on behalf of a soul in Purgatory, by devoutly visiting a cemetery during November 1<sup>st</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> (it is a partial indulgence during other days of the year) to pray for the dead. In order to access this indulgence on behalf of a soul in Purgatory, your own soul must be adequately prepared by receiving the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion (within several days of visiting the cemetery), and by spending a little time praying for the intentions of the Pope (one Our Father and Hail Mary is a good minimum), which expresses our unity with the Church. We can give no greater gift to a loved one who has passed away!

#### 5. What is the “communion of saints”?

The "communion of saints" that we profess in the Apostle's and Nicene creeds, is also known as "the Church" - that is, the Church in its whole entirety, which has three parts: 1) the faithful on earth; 2) those who have died and are now being purified in Purgatory; 3) the blessed in Heaven. We are one entity, or "body", and Jesus is the head. Therefore, the successes and the failures of each individual person affects the whole body, which is mystically connected. This is why our prayers for each other, our prayers for the suffering souls in Purgatory, and the saints in Heaven who pray for us – these prayers actually work! They really draw forth grace from God's merciful heart, to have an actual effect on souls.<sup>4</sup>

#### 6. Should we pray for the dead?

The souls in Purgatory are completely engaged with the beautiful yet difficult cleansing of themselves, to be made pure and whole for life in Heaven, and there are no "shortcuts" for them to access for themselves in this process (we have plenty on earth – the sacraments, spiritual devotions, indulgences, etc.). Also, each person's degree of purgation will match the degree to which they have sinned – just as in a legal system the severity of jail time is supposed to "match" the severity of the crime – and in this way justice is achieved. However, in God's infinite mercy, He allows the Church Militant (you and I) to "pay the debt" of each other's sins through our sacrifices of prayer, fasting, and especially the Mass.<sup>5</sup> This grace extends to the suffering souls in Purgatory, and in this way we can lessen their suffering and speed their entry into Heaven.<sup>6</sup> Praying for the dead is also a *spiritual work of mercy*, and so, like the *corporal works of mercy*, we have a moral responsibility to do it.

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<sup>3</sup> Groeschel, Fr. B.J. (2009). *After This Life: What Catholics Believe About What Happens Next*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division: Huntingdon, IN, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> See Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 954-962 for more information.

<sup>5</sup> Offering sacrifices in atonement for our sins has always been a Jewish and Christian practice (cf. Job 1:5)

<sup>6</sup> See YOUCAT n. 160 for more information. This practice also has its roots in the Old Testament, where Judas Maccabeus made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin (2 Macc 12:46).

**7. Is it OK to scatter my relative's ashes in the ocean instead of burying them in a graveyard?**

Even though it may look classy or romantic in the movies, cremated remains should never be scattered. Cremains, though in ash form, are still what remain of the body, and we should no more scatter them than we would scatter body parts about. Placed in a worthy container, they should be buried in a grave or inurned in a columbarium niche, preferably in a Catholic cemetery (which is sacred ground that has been consecrated by a bishop). This Catholic practice expresses reverence and respect for the dignity of the human body as a member of Christ.

Furthermore, the very act of visiting a site and seeing the deceased's name (not possible if someone's remains have been scattered), provides comfort and closure not only to family and friends, but for everyone whose lives were touched by the deceased. It is also for generations that follow who will want to connect with their heritage.