



The Month of Holy Souls

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *Holy Souls*?

The Catholic Church dedicates the entire month of November to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. This season begins with the *Hallowtide Triduum*, which consists of All Hallows' Eve (Halloween), All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day. During the entire month we pray for the souls of those who have died, especially those whom we have known and loved. Remembering them, praying for them, and giving thanks for them, pleases God, who makes use of our prayers to help purify these souls in Purgatory that He loves.

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, 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"¹, 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.²

Why are we called to 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. This grace extends to the suffering souls in Purgatory, and in this way we can lessen their suffering and speed their entry into Heaven.³

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.⁴

¹ Groeschel, Fr. B.J. (2009). *After This Life: What Catholics Believe About What Happens Next*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division: Huntingdon, IN, p. 58.

² *YOUCAT*. (2011). Ignatius Press: San Francisco, n. 159. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], n. 1030-1031.

³ *Ibid.*, n. 160.

⁴ CCC, n. 954-962.