

Homily for the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day)

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Last night, the Toronto Blue Jays and the Los Angeles Dodgers played Game Seven of the World Series to determine the championship of Major League Baseball, with the Dodgers winning 5-4 in extra innings. As in other major sports, the quest for a championship is the ultimate sign of success for a team in any given season. Even if the winner did not have the best regular season record, they are still recognized as the best team because of their triumph when the stakes were the highest.

As far as individual success goes, the ultimate honor for a baseball player or other athlete is to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, a distinction which recognizes a career marked by excellence and achievement. Being inducted into the Hall of Fame is an opportunity for the individual to celebrate, as well as providing an opportunity for family, friends, and fans

to join in that celebration as a sign of their gratitude for the contribution that player has had on the game.

Every year on November 1st, the Church turns her attention to her own version of the Hall of Fame as yesterday we celebrated the Solemnity of All Saints. On All Saints' Day, we recognize all of those members of the Body of Christ who have entered into that place of greatest honor imaginable, namely, the glory of Heaven. Just as with the Hall of Fame in sports, the saints who are in Heaven are those who have excelled in their career as disciples of Jesus Christ. The saints are those who have used the gifts given to them for the benefit of the Church and the world, just as the skill of athletes benefit the teams of which they are a member.

Just as with the Hall of Fame, there is a process involved in recognizing certain individuals for their heroic virtue and witness to the faith. The Church's recognition, similar in a way to a Hall of Fame induction, takes place at the canonization, during which the Church confirms that the saint is indeed in Heaven. These celebrations are a cause for great rejoicing for the entire Church, and they often draw thousands of the faithful who join in that celebration.

Even though there is a formal process for recognizing that a saint is indeed in Heaven, the process is not like the Hall of Fame where the person is voted in by a committee. It is Christ, the Eternal Judge, and He alone who elects to welcome one of His servants to be in Heaven with Him. As a result of that, there are saints in Heaven of whom we are unaware. In the vision of Heaven recorded by St. John in the Book of Revelation, he speaks of a “great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue” (Revelation 7:9). Those saints whom the Church has recognized formally are but a portion of those who have been elected by Christ to share in the victory of eternal life in Heaven.

Our Mass today commemorates All the Faithful Departed, commonly known as All Souls’ Day. As we begin the month of November, traditionally dedicated to praying for the dead, it would be good for us to reflect on what the Catholic Church teaches about death and what Christians believe about life after death.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that every human being is a “unity of body and soul” and that “every spiritual soul is created immediately by God ... and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at

the final Resurrection” (CCC 366). Each soul is unique. There is no reincarnation.

In the Profession of Faith that we profess during Mass on Sundays and Solemnities, we say that we “look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” Thus, the *Catechism* explains, “We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and He will raise them up on the last day. Our resurrection, like His own, will be the work of the Most Holy Trinity” (CCC 989).

At the very moment of one’s death, there is “a particular judgment that refers [one’s] life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven – through a purification [called purgatory] or immediately – or immediate and everlasting damnation” (CCC 1022). This “everlasting damnation” is known as hell.

Regarding purgatory, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of

the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (CCC 1030-1031). This teaching is based on the practice of prayer for the dead as mentioned in Sacred Scripture when Judas Maccabeus “made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Macc. 12:46).

“The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only He determines the moment of its coming. Then through his Son Jesus Christ He will pronounce the final word on all history. ... “The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death” (CCC 1040).

“The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death. In the litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: ‘From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord’; to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us ‘at the hour of our death’ in the Hail Mary; and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death” (CCC 1014).

As we do at every Mass, we come to the altar which unites us to the Church throughout the world. We are also united through the Eucharistic sacrifice with those who have gone before us and are already in Heaven. Finally, we are united with those in Purgatory who await their entrance into

Heaven after their purification. While we pray for them in a special way at this Mass for All Souls Day and throughout the month of November, we remember those Poor Souls at each Mass and our prayers for them are our greatest gift to them. Let us desire to receive the Eucharist with greater love and fervor so that we may be strengthened by that gift, along with the prayers of the saints in Heaven, so that at the end of our life, we may be welcomed by the Lord into their company in Heaven to rejoice for the rest of eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.