

November 2011

Dear Catholic Daughters:

Every Catholic knows that November 2 has always been called the feast of All Souls, just as November 1st is the feast of All Saints. Today the Church calls this feast the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. That title has a nice ring to it, but what does it really mean?

Every one of us can recall people, families, friends as well as Catholic Daughters who were close to us and good to us, people who have died. We also know the day will come for each of us when our life on earth will come to an end. When we're young, we think we're going to live forever. We may live dangerously and act as though we're invincible. But sooner or later, circumstances force us to realize that death is a fact of life. Nevertheless, society still surrounds death with a shroud of secrecy. People are reluctant to talk about it openly. Some try to hide the reality of death from their children. Others try to stave death off as long as possible by extraordinary artificial means. But the inevitability of death can only be postponed so long. Even people of faith can be overcome by their fear of death. Grief can cause a person to lose hope for a time. We all react differently to the death of people we love and to the prospect of our own death. But as our lives go on, we can choose to believe the words of Jesus about eternal life more and more deeply. Because we are people who believe, we can come to accept the reality of death with certain serenity.

If you've suffered the loss of someone you loved dearly, you know how real and painful the sense of loss can be. No one should ever be ashamed of their

feelings. Jesus cried openly at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. There is some consolation in the thought that our loved ones are going to God, that they are about to enter a new life. But nothing makes up for the absence of someone you love. The gap remains, but it will not remain forever. When you stop to think about it, as long as the gap remains, the bond between people who have loved each other is preserved. God does not fill the gap but keeps it empty. This allows us to keep our former communion with our loved ones alive, even at the cost of pain.

Death is a rite of passage, painful for all concerned, but never to be suffered alone or in fear. We do not walk alone, and we have no need to be afraid. If you count Jesus among your friends in life, he will be your friend in death. He will give you strength and comfort as you approach the end of your life on earth, and he will be with you at the hour of your death. Jesus gives strength and comfort to the dying just as he does to the living, especially to those who are grieving, and to those about to give loved ones back to God who first gave them to us.

We all have questions about what life after death will be like. Naturally we wonder if and how we will remain in relationship with those who were dear to us. We have every reason to believe that the beauty of human experiences, the memories of human happiness, and the goodness of human achievements will not be lost. We believe that the bonds of love between human beings remain alive even in death. In Jesus, with him and through him, people of good faith will be united forever in perfect love.

Even though the Church emphasizes resurrection and the glory to come, we cannot dismiss the notion of justice. We believe in the mercy of God and in the healing power of Jesus, but we can never know with absolute certainty the fate of

the dead. To be completely honest, we know that we need to be purified. This is why praying for the dead is an ancient tradition for the Christian community. There is consolation in knowing that the bonds between us and our beloved dead are not broken, that we can intercede for them, and even, if God so wills, speed their entry in heaven. We believe in the communion of saints. We belong to the communion of saints. Together with those who have died, we are the communion of saints.

Death always brings sorrow and tears, but the dead do not perish. This day is set apart each year to remember them and to pray for them. Merely to mourn the dead helps neither them nor us. We pray for them today around the same table where we gather to celebrate the death of Jesus every Sunday. God the Father will do for them, and eventually for us, what he did for Jesus. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Way and Truth. But is he *our* way, *our* truth, and *our* life? Is he *my* way, *my* truth and *my* life? If he is, then his body broken for me and given to me in the Eucharist truly becomes my bread of life and food for my final journey. It will be my privilege to remember all of our deceased Catholic Daughters at mass, throughout the month of November.

*May the Lord support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in his mercy may he give us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last.*

Father Ed

National Chaplain