the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR
Aboard St. Peter's Barque with the Catechism Charting Our Course

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Chasing Holiness

God introduces himself to Moses, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (*CCC 2575*) God makes it clear here that those who died in him somehow still live, and he is their God as well as God to Moses, still alive. As the relationship between God and Moses becomes more intimate, Moses pleads for the forgiveness of his people who have sinned. God listens, protects the people in battle, and forgives them their sins because Moses interceded.

> "Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin." (2 Maccabees 12:46)

The above passage from this last book in the Old Testament is most often cited as an evidence for purgatory and the ancient practice of praying for the dead: "From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayer in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God." (*CCC 1032*)

We believe that interceding for the dead is possible because of the existence of purgatory. This is a state of soul, immediately following death, when it is purified of selfish attachments and readied for an embodied life in God at the final judgment. Prayers offered up by any in our 'communion of saints' (those with God in spirit, as well as those here alive working toward sainthood) are heard by a God who loves and calls each individual to a loving relationship. Thus, 'intercessory' prayer is a two-way street: we pray and intercede for those still in purgatory and ask those already with God in spirit to intercede for us.

All Souls' Day...

Yesterday, we observed the Solemnity of All Saints (Nov. 1). Today, we observe the Solemnity of All Souls', prayerfully remembering at Mass all those souls undergoing purification in purgatory prior to joining all the saints in heaven. The term commemoration takes on a special meaning when applied to the proper name given to this day by the Church: *The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed*. While not designated a solemnity, as All Saints Day is, it acquires the status of a solemnity in practice because it takes precedence over memorials, feasts, and even Sundays.

All Souls' Day calls to mind two essential teachings, based on Scripture, of the Church from its earliest days: first, many who die free of serious/mortal sin must still undergo purification before admittance to the beatific vision; and, secondly, the living can offer prayers and Masses to benefit those in purgatory. However, the Church has no official teaching about how long, where, and what the nature of this purification is. Because technically the afterlife is outside of time and space, it probably helps not to imagine this purgation as taking place somewhere and for some amount of time. Rather, this purgation is, perhaps, more easily thought of as a state where we are stripped of the things we held onto other than God. Only then is final union with God granted.

SAINTS PRESERVE US!

The 16th Century witnessed both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Luther's 95 Theses of 1517 culminated in the Lutheran Reformation. Henry VIII broke with the Pope when his Act of Supremacy (1534) established the Anglican Church. John Calvin laid out a framework of Protestant theology in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), giving rise to Calvinism. And in Italy the Council of Trent (1545-1563) convened to make a definitive determination of Catholic doctrines and to undertake wide ranging reforms. A very big century!

St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584) was a major figure amidst all this. At 12, he received the clerical *tonsure* (rite where hair is cut/shaved and a *surplice* is issued; a surplice is the white, half-length tunic worn by clergy). He then undertook a life of service to the Church. Earning a doctorate in civil and canon law at age 22, he was then summoned to Rome by his uncle, the newly elected Pope Pius IV, who appointed him 'lay' cardinal-deacon with major administrative duties. When in 1562 the Pope reconvened the Council of Trent, suspended since 1552, Charles worked successfully to push through all the work envisioned for the Council. At its end he was ordained a priest, appointed cardinal-priest and named bishop of Milan. From there he translated the Council's work into action. (See webpage) He is a patron saint of catechists, catechumens, and seminarians.



SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...

It's ironic that Jews celebrate Hanukkah but reject as *apocryphal* (*of questionable authenticity*) the very books providing the historical background for this eight-day holiday, Maccabees I and II. Catholic and Orthodox Christians include both in the Old Testament. Why the Jewish rabbis excluded these from their canon (*Tanakh*= Hebrew Bible) is an open question to this day. That said, the basis for the Hanukkah observance is found in a short account in the *Talmud (primary written source of Jewish Law*) describing the legend of the rededication of the Temple and the miracle of the oil for the *ner tamid* (Eternal Light), always to be burning in the Temple.

As the Talmud notes, when the Jewish rebel forces commanded by Judah Maccabee (Judah, of the priestly Hasmonean family) defeated the Seleucid rulers and retook the desecrated Temple, the first task was to rededicate it to God and relight the Eternal Light. Only enough uncontaminated oil was found to provide one day's fuel for the eternal light, but miraculously it burned for eight days, thus providing time to secure more oil. The celebration of this miracle is commemorated by Jews worldwide to this day as the eight day Festival of Lights.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, look to these biblical books for reasons other than the events described above. Our interest focuses primarily on Maccabees II, especially appropriate during the dual feasts of All Saints and All Souls. This book, while recounting much of the story as told in Maccabees I, really has a theological as opposed to nationalistic purpose. Several doctrinal beliefs are discussed. Key among these are prayers and sacrifices for the dead, the intercession of the saints, and resurrection of the dead at the last judgment.

Catholic teaching about purgatory and the value of offering masses for the deceased finds some of its biblical support in this book. Orthodox Christians, however, do not accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. They do agree that many souls of the departed may need further purification and prayers, but there is no definitive Orthodox theology on the matter.







Catechetical Corner



> "The Church who, as Mother, has borne the Christian sacramentally in her womb during his earthly pilgrimage, accompanies him at his journey's end, in order to surrender him 'into the Father's hands.' She offers to the Father, in Christ, the child of his grace, and she commits to the earth, in hope, the seed of the body that will rise in glory..." (*CCC 1683*)

The Christian Funeral is traditionally held at home, in Church, or at the cemetery; the Mass is held in Church. At this time, the Church strives to make known our communion with the deceased as well as just how the community now participates in this communion. She also sees as her role, the "proclamation of eternal life to the community." (*CCC 1684*)

While civilizations have been burying their dead for eons, it is Christ who has made the communion of all those who died in God real. We, as the Body of Christ, live eternally in relationship with our Father and all the members of his body, living and dead.

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