Homily of All Souls, 2026

Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 23:1-6; Romans 5:5-11; John 6:37-40

We celebrated the Church Triumphant (All Saints) yesterday. Today, we who are on earth (the Church Militant), pray for the Church Suffering, the departed souls in Purgatory. The Catholic Church teaches that we assist the souls of the dead who are in the condition of purification in Purgatory by praying for them, offering Eucharistic sacrifice for them, and undertake almsgiving and works of penance on their behalf (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1032). Our celebration today enables us to pray for countless departed souls that Masses are not requested or offered for.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "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" (CCC 1030). "The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031).

Communion with the departed is a common practice in many cultures. Praying for the departed existed in the Jewish belief far before Christianity. We read in 2 Maccabees 12:43-46, "Judas then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, in as much as he had the resurrection in mind; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. …Thus, he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin."

Indications of the existence of Purgatory are, also, found in the New Testament. For instance, we read in Revelation 21:22, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb. ... Nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who does abominable things or tells lies. Only those who will enter whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." At our death, none of us is clean and worthy to enter the "City of the Lord God Almighty." "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Each soul, therefore, goes through a purification before entering the glory of God. The location of Purgatory and the duration that souls spend in Purgatory are beyond human knowledge since it is a mystical reality.

The idea of purification of souls before the souls enter into the ancestral realm was not alien to some ancient cultures. The Igbos of Nigeria have special traditional ceremonies for releasing souls from whatever might have withheld them from transforming and joining the ancestral realm. The Catholic teaching on the existence of Purgatory was not difficult for many converts to understand.

As Christians, we are pilgrims of hope. Therefore, today's celebration is a celebration of hope for us sinners. God's love is everlasting, even, in the afterlife. The first reading says, "They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; … and their going forth from us utter destruction. … yet is their hope full of immortality, chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed …" This is an assurance that by God's grace and mercy, the faithful shall be purified, and they shall abide with God. St. Paul says in the second reading that "Hope does not disappoint."

In our celebration, we believe in the fulfilment of the words of Jesus in today's gospel, "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me … And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day" (John 6:37-39).

Let us pray: Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let your perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP