

The month of November is traditionally dedicated to the faithful departed, but we should not just remember them in this month and then forget about them for the rest of the year. Perhaps the reason why no-one speaks of the souls in Purgatory is to avoid frightening or upsetting people. Yet, no matter how much one might wish to deny the existence of Purgatory, it is a reality.

The teaching of the Church leaves us in no doubt. **The second General Council of Lyons in 1274 and the Council of Florence in 1439**, both agreed that the faithful should perform acts for the suffering soul's in Purgatory. Continuing the Church's teaching the Council of Trent declared against Reformers who denied the fires of Purgatory. In addition to this, the Church has set aside certain times when we especially remember our deceased relatives and friends. At such times we should also remember the Holy Souls who have no-one to pray for them.

Praying for the souls has sound biblical as well as traditional foundations. For example, chapter 12 of the second Book of Maccabees tells us: "They turned to prayer beseeching that the sin which, had been committed might be blotted out". The same passage goes on to assure us that it is a good thing to, pray for the dead, that they may be "loosened from their sins."

Who goes to Purgatory? "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"- (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1030). In Purgatory the souls that have died with venial sin are purified before they can go to meet God.

The duration and intensity of their sufferings can be lessened through the prayers and good works of the faithful on earth. Souls in Purgatory can no longer help themselves as their time for gaining merit is over once they leave this world.

Fortunately, those of us who are still on earth can relieve the sufferings of our family members and friends by having Masses said for them. "The Church also recommends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead" (**CCC no. 1032**). We can win plenary indulgences to release more quickly those detained in Purgatory.

It is a Reality

By
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This can be done on the Feast of the Holy Souls every year, by saying certain prayers and visiting the cemetery but 'we can win plenary indulgences every other day too so long as we fulfil the conditions that the Church asks.

There are: many prayers that can help the Holy Souls, such as this traditional prayer known to many: *"Eternal rest grant to them, oh Lord, let your perpetual light shine upon them and may they rest in peace"*. This prayer can be said at any time, as we go about our daily tasks at home, at work, when you're travelling, waiting for the bus, in fact anywhere. Another way of helping them is to offer up the Via Crucis for them. **As St. Ambrose said,** *"We remembered them in life; let us not forget them in death."*

There are numerous other ways in which the souls can be helped for example, acts of charity towards our neighbour, fasting from some self-indulgence such as smoking or television, and other acts of self-denial.

One often hears it said nowadays that the person who is suffering a lot of pain or misery in life is doing their Purgatory on earth. **Blessed Padre Pio**, the priest who carried the pain of the stigmata for fifty years, said that if people knew the value of suffering, they would ask for more. He also said that suffering is often wasted. **When people do not offer it up in union with Christ's suffering, but allow it to become a source of resentment and bitterness. People who do suffer cheerfully and willingly may be shortening their time in Purgatory, and by offering their suffering for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, they will win the progress of these souls to Heaven.**

May God grant us the grace always to remember these souls. Because nor should we forget that the Holy Souls can intercede for us. **Fr. Schup**, a Jesuit priest, reminds us that "we must pray for them, so that at they can pray for us".

"We believe

that that the souls of those who died in a state of charity and true repentance before having made amends for their sins of commission and omission with worthy fruits of penance, are purified with purgatory pains ... and that the offerings of the living faithful help to alleviate these pains; that is , the sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, almsgiving and other works of piety that the faithful have traditionally performed for one another in accordance with the laws of the Church"

(Council of Lyons)