



Over the years, we’ve had back-to-back feast days on November 1st and 2nd to remember those who have died—All Saints Day, then All Souls Day. What’s the

difference between them? All Saints Day honors those souls who enjoy heavenly glory, totally free from any taint of sin. When the Church declares a person to be a saint, it often has some sign about that from the Holy Spirit (usually in the form of miracles connecting the saintly person’s prayers with someone living here on earth, like a healing of someone’s illness that defies any medical or logical explanation). However, we trust that there are many more saints in Heaven than just those officially declared by the Church. When someone is in Heaven, they really don’t need our prayers because they already have everything they could possibly want by being in God’s presence. They’ve reached a perfect state of being, and, thus, their journey is totally over.

On All Souls Day, faithful Christians are invited to pray for those souls who have not yet entered heaven, but are believed to be in Purgatory, due to some taint of unconfessed sin on their souls (sins not serious enough to merit eternity in Hell) or attachment to any kind of sin when they had died. Since we should never presume to know the state of anyone’s soul at death (only God knows), it’s good to offer prayers to help the dead reach Heaven, especially through the sacrifice of the Mass (offering Mass intentions). Praying for the dead has been a long-standing practice since the early years of the Church. In the Bible, we see references to praying

for the dead to reach their eternal reward in 2 Maccabees 12:38-46, in which we hear Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus take up a collection among his soldiers to make atonement for fellow soldiers who had died in battle and whose bodies were found with idolatrous amulets on them, forbidden for Jews to wear. It says that “he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin”(v. 46), “for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought.” (v.44-45) In 2nd Timothy, St. Paul prays that God has mercy on a man who had died and who had helped him while Paul was in prison (1:16-28)

One of the benefits for us to have days like All Saints and All Souls is to encourage us to grow in our desire to live saintly lives, as we desire to join the saints in Heaven someday. Such days should get us thinking about our own mortality, and how God may be calling each of us to use however much limited time we have left on earth in a more loving, faithful and wise manner. Those 2 feast days also give us time to reflect on how God has touched our lives with love through those who’ve died, and to give thanks for such moments. When we think of those times, we, in turn, should be inspired to live more in such loving, faithful ways.

