

The Solemnity of All Souls • CTK • November 2, 2008

How you ever wondered why we pray for the dead, or even if it make sense to pray for the dead? The Christian answer is unequivocal, yes! It makes sense to pray for the dead and our Christian faith asks us to do so, both in liturgy and in private. Why? What possible good can it do? To remind God to be merciful? God needs no such reminders. To ask God to see a good heart beneath all the struggles of a human life? God doesn't need a lesson from us on understanding. God is already perfect understanding, perfect love, and perfect forgiveness.

So why pray for the dead? For the same reason we pray for anything. We need to pray. It does us good and God has asked us to pray because prayer is meant to change us, not God.

Thus, the first reason we pray for the dead is because that prayer helps us, the living. Prayer for the dead is meant to console us, the living. Closely tied to this is a second reason: We pray for our dead loved ones to help heal our relationship to them. When someone close to us dies, it is natural, to feel a certain amount of guilt, because by, being human, we have had a less-than-perfect relationship with him or her. There is unfinished business between us. In praying for that person, among other things, we help wash clean those things that remain painful between us.

This takes us to the heart of the matter of today's celebration and its twin All Saints. We pray for the dead because we believe in the Communion of Saints. The Communion of Saints is an essential Christian doctrine, found in our Creed, that calls us to recognize and believe the vital flow of life that continues to exist between ourselves and our loved ones, even beyond death. Through Jesus, death is not the end and we are connected, in communion. Love, presence, and communion reach through death.

Just as we can hold someone's hand as he or she is dying, and this can be an immense comfort to both of us, so too we can hold another's hand beyond death. Indeed, since death washes many things clean, in our prayers for our loved ones who have died, the connection can be purer, the forgiveness deeper, the perspective wider, and the distance between us less. Communion with our loved ones after death is blessed, removing much of what kept us apart in this life.

Based on Praying for the Dead, by Ron Rolheiser, Nov 04, 2001

This communion is perhaps seen most clearly at the table, the Altar. The body of Christ is not only on this table; the body of Christ is also *at* this

table. Ringing around us at this table are the members of our families who have gone before us in death. And ringing around us at this table are the saints whose hearts are lifted up to God. And ringing around us at this table are the martyrs, ancient like Agnes and recent like Romero.

At the table, the Altar, we celebrate and remember the communion of saints, confident that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one, do not unravel with death.

So, I invite you to remember someone who has died, perhaps in this past year. If you want, write their name on one of the paper hearts in the pew. During our Litany of Remembrance, you can bring the paper heart forward and place in the basket. We will use these hearts during the month of November.

In Holy Remembrance:

Hold them in prayer.

Ask God to wash clean anything that remains painful between you.

Let go of any unfinished business.

Celebrate the love of God that sustains and unites us in communion.