



Fr. Timothy Horner
All Souls Day, Nov 2, 2007
School Mass 9:00 AM

November is month in which we are urged to pray for the **souls of the faithful departed,**

--- obviously not those in heaven as they already have all that we could possibly pray for for them., (odd at 1st sight that the readings are about heaven)

---nor those in hell (past praying for)

---therefore those in **Purgatory**. Since we pray especially for the release from P. of deceased relatives and friends, it might be worth thinking what we know about P.

This custom of praying for the dead goes back to at least C2 BC, **2 Maccabees** (OT) Judas Maccabaeus had fought a battle against invaders of Israel and won, but some men had died. They were found to be wearing medals/charms of Pagan gods. Judas therefore took up a collection and sent it to Jerusalem to have prayers said for those dead so that they might be released from their sin. They had after all died in a noble cause, but had sinned. He believed that prayer for the dead would be effective, and that belief has been carried on in Christianity from its earliest days

LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI (excellent example of the Latin *Gerund*)-- the law of praying is the law of believing OR how we pray shows how we believe, or should believe. The church urges us to pray for the souls of the faithful departed, which shows that she believes that is a holy and wholesome thing to do.

Unfortunately we don't know much about Purgatory. The Maccabees ref is quite clear; there are obscure refs in Mk 9:48, 1 Cor 3.15 and 1 Pet 1.7 which may or may not refer to purgatory and do refer to fire, on which some have built a fearsome picture of a fiery, though temporary, P. I am told that the Eastern Orthodox see P as the place where one can grow into the full spiritual stature that God intended for each of us when he created us. I like that. The West sees P. rather as the time to work off the temporal punishment still due for our sins even after they have been forgiven.

St Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510), blends the two but favoring the East. She was an Italian married woman, mystic and visionary. One of her visions was of **Purgatory**. **NB:** we are not bound to believe private



revelations, unless the Church explicitly endorses them, but neither are we bound NOT to believe them. We may choose.

Here is what the account in *Treatise on Purgatory* of her vision says happens after death:

1. Only once, at its individual judgment, when it sees God, does the soul understand the reason for its purgatory, ie. Its sins.
2. After that it is so filled with the love of God and such is its joy in God's will for it, that it has no thought for itself but only joy that God's will is being carried out.
3. There is no joy to be compared with the JOY of the souls in purgatory. except the joy of heaven (astounding) (Beatific vision)
4. But there is a bit of a sting in the tail: In P., great Joy and great suffering do not exclude one another. But the great joy will dominate. Those who have been in love will understand that.

This is a very joyful vision of P: a foretaste of heaven, so it's not after all irrelevant that the readings should be about heaven. The soul, having once seen God, will be filled to overflowing responding to his love with its own love for his beauty, goodness, power.

In the book of Genesis, **Jacob loved Rachel** and worked for seven years to win her, **and they seemed to him like a few days because he loved her so much**. That was for a finite, mortal woman. How much more true will that be when our love is for the Infinite, Immortal God.