

All Souls Day
Homily of Bishop Barres
St. Agnes Cathedral
November 2, 2022

Yesterday we celebrated the Solemnity of All Saints. We celebrated our Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints. We recalled a wide range of saints with different charisms and ecclesial missions through every century. Their heroic witness to the Faith inspires us to embrace more deeply our own baptismal call to holiness and mission.

Today we celebrate All Souls Day. We pray for the souls of the faithful departed. We turn our gazes to the faces of so many who have gone before us.

We visit cemeteries, visualize gravestones of loved ones, and pray for the souls of all those on our family genealogy trees, known and unknown to us.

We remember and pray for the souls of friends, and we pray for all the deceased.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul summarizes the essence of what we celebrate today when he writes: “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard...what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Cardinal Merry del Val (1865-1930) further elaborates: “Receive everything from God and your life will be the first stanza of an Eternal Hymn, the dawn of a happiness without sunset.”

As the Church in the United States engages in a nation-wide Eucharistic Revival, we remember that we are never closer to our deceased loved ones than we are at the Catholic Mass when in every Eucharistic Prayer we solemnly pray for the souls of the dead. Indeed, it is our fundamental belief that we are never truly separated when we are united in prayer and the Eucharist.

Certain parts of the Nicene Creed that we recite at every Sunday Mass come to life on All Souls Day today. “He will come to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end...I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

Section 997 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus’ Resurrection.”

Our Catholic doctrine and our Creed are so important here. True Catholic doctrine concerning our liturgical celebration of All Souls Day keeps us anchored in truth, hope, and charity.

We approach the inevitability of death with the Catholic truths that set us free and keep us joyful and happy as we walk on earth with a burning desire for eternal happiness with God in Heaven.

It is no wonder that C.S. Lewis, the great Christian apologist, once said that the people who are most productive in life are the people who keep their eyes fixed on Heaven.

Without a firm adherence to Catholic doctrine on life and death, it is so easy to get involved in Spiritism or to start consulting mediums in hope of communicating with our dead loved ones, or to get involved in tarot cards or to stop into Manhattan storefronts to consult fortune tellers.

All these tragic practices are dangerous to the soul and are clear violations of the First Commandment, and they open wide the doors of deception to the great deceiver, the devil, the evil one. Those involved with exorcism ministry will tell you clearly that the tragedy of the need for exorcisms is so often the result of people opening the portals of their lives and their souls to the Evil One in pursuing these violations of the First Commandment.

Section 2116 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is very clear: “All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to ‘unveil’ the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.”

As the Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, as the Chief Theologian, Teacher, and Successor of the Apostles, I must make it clear in charity and truth that no

Catholic should be involved in these practices nor should any Catholic encourage others to be involved in these practices.

On August 12, 2020, I issued a Pastoral Letter entitled “‘Mediums’ and the Catholic Faith.” We have reposted it today on our diocesan website – **drvc.org** – for your reference and review.

Death, for the Catholic Christian, is illuminated by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Catholics, we interpret the inevitability of Death through the luminous hope and joy of Heaven and our call to Eternal Life.

Pope Benedict XVI stated “that only those who can recognize a great hope in death, can live a life based on hope. If we reduce man exclusively to his horizontal dimensions to that which can be perceived empirically, life itself, loses its profound meaning. Man needs eternity for every other hope is too brief, too limited for him. Man can be explained only if there is a Love which overcomes every isolation, even that of death, in a totality which also transcends time and space. Man can only be explained, he finds his deepest meaning, only if there is God. And we know that God left his distance for us and made himself close. He entered in to our life and tells us: ‘I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.’ (John 11:25-26)...Faith in eternal life gives to Christians the courage to love our earth ever more intensely and to work in order to build a future for it, to give it a true and sure hope.”¹

¹ Pope Benedict XVI’s November 2, 2011 General Audience entitled “Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed.” This homily draws extensively on the insights of Pope Benedict XVI in this General Audience.