

- This past week we celebrated two very glorious feast days: All Saints Day and All Souls Day! What I love about these twin feast days is that they present us with ultimate realities and challenge us to live our faith with integrity in response to these ultimate realities.
- Both of these feasts present us with the fact that one day we'll all die and have to face our Maker, and that can either be a very good day, or the most awful day of all.
- Yet the focus on death brought to bear by All Saints Day and All Souls Day is not macabre or maudlin. No, these feast days call us to look beyond the finitude of earthly existence to see what lies beyond that great veil separating this life from the next.
- On All Saints Day, we see the glory of the new and heavenly Jerusalem, the home for which we've all been created. And through this feast we are reminded of what it is that we hope for in the depths of our souls: an eternal and loving union with our Triune Lord!
- All Saints Day reminds us of the reward that awaits those who run the race of life heroically: glorious sainthood!
- And on All Souls Day, we are reminded of our solemn duty to pray for those who have gone before us through that great veil separating us from eternity, so that they, too, might be purified of their sins and enjoy that new and heavenly Jerusalem.
- In short, these are not feasts for atheists or agnostics! Oh no, they are bold feasts that loudly proclaim our faith in God and in His justice and mercy.
- At the same time, these magnificent feasts remind us that eternal joy and happiness in the next life is not something to be presumed. To go to Heaven and live forever in the joy of the Beatific Vision requires that we do our best to live our Catholic faith with integrity.
- In the Gospel today Jesus takes the scribes and Pharisees to task because they do not practice what they preach. They are people whose outward practice of their faith belies their true beliefs and behaviors, and Jesus tells the crowd around Him not to be like them.
- Rather, He encourages the people to live with integrity, to be willing to serve others, and to be humble. The implication for us, of course, is to do the same: to be authentic in our practice of the faith, to practice our Catholic faith with integrity, with purity of heart.
- On All Saints Day I mentioned that the Hebrew word for purity is *emeth*, which means truth. I spoke of how, if we want to be made saints, we must be made true.
- Just as a carpenter will "true up" a board to bring about or a restore a certain mechanical accuracy or form, our souls must "trued up." They must be leveled, squared, and balanced so that they might be readied to join with God in the eternal embrace of Heaven.
- This process of being made true requires that we be purified of our sins. God and sin are mutually exclusive; they cannot exist together. Thus, if we wish to be eternally united to God in Heaven, we absolutely must be purified of all trace of sin.
- It sounds a bit daunting, doesn't it? And left to our own devices, it can seem well-nigh impossible. For every sin we commit, even venial, we commit an injustice against God that must be rectified. This is why priests give us a penance when we go to confession.
- Our penances are the way that we make reparation for the sins we've confessed. Of course, this requires that we do our penances not perfunctorily, but with real love for God, and with a real desire to repair the damage to our relationship with Him that we've caused by our sins.
- Of course, we can do penance at any time. This is why the Church asks us to give up meat on Fridays (or do some other form of penance). It's why we are encouraged to give up something in Lent. It's why we fast and abstain from meat on certain days of the year.

- We do these things in order to strengthen our wills and make reparation for our sins. And we do these things to unite ourselves in some small way to our Lord's passion and death.
- If at our judgment, we have died in God's friendship – without mortal sin on our souls – but have not made sufficient reparation for our sins, then God very mercifully allows us to go to Purgatory, where we can be fully cleansed, purified, and made ready for Heaven.
- And we know by faith that the Masses, the prayers, the sacrifices and penances we offer up for the poor souls in Purgatory helps to bring about their purification.
- So, this is why in November we offer a special Novena of Masses, that we pray the *Litany of the Faithful Departed* after each daily Mass, that we encourage you to turn in the names of your departed loved ones with your All Souls envelopes, and why we post the names of all our deceased parishioners on the church walls so that you are reminded to pray for them.
- These little actions are wonderful ways to practice charity for the poor souls in Purgatory.
- Yet, Holy Mother Church also offers to us indulgences, especially in this time of the year, that we can apply to the souls of the faithful departed, to help remit their sins.
- The *Catechism* defines an indulgence as: "the remission...of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has been forgiven." These can partial or plenary, a full remission of all sins.
- The Church grants indulgences under certain defined conditions as a means of dispensing the treasury of merits and satisfaction won by Christ and the saints.
- If you've been reading my bulletin articles, you know that the Church offers a plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions, during the first 8 days of November simply by going to a cemetery and praying for all the deceased.
- When I say "the usual conditions," that means that, in addition to praying for the deceased souls, the person seeking to gain the indulgence must have received Holy Communion that day, go to confession within 20 days of the action, be free of an attachment to sin, and offer prayers for the Holy Father (generally a Creed and an Our Father).
- In fact, Fr. Jones will be leading prayers at Belmont Abbey Cemetery at 3pm today for this very reason, and you're all encouraged to join him.
- Beautifully, the word *indulgence* means "kind" or "tender." Gaining an indulgence for a soul in Purgatory is a means of being kind and tender to the poor souls, as well as a means of promoting God's glory.
- While sinful Church leaders in the past have abused indulgences, the Church still very much encourages us to seek them. This is because indulgences keep the doctrine of purgatory before us, and they deepen our understanding of sin.
- In this way, seeking indulgences has a supernatural effect on us, and they help prepare us for our final judgment. Although the cemetery indulgence for the first 8 days of November can only be applied to the dead, most indulgences can be used to remit our own sins.
- Of course, there is a great spiritual gain for us when we are charitable enough to offer an indulgence that we could have kept for ourselves for someone who has died. In faith, it's good to trust that our generosity in this way will always be repaid by God.
- Brothers and sisters, this time of year presents us with eternal realities: death, judgment, Heaven and hell. This is a time of year that we're called to prepare for these last 4 things.
- Indeed, to be united with God in Heaven, we must be pure; we must be made true – whether by our sufferings and penances in this life, by the fires of purgatory in the next life.
- May we practice our faith with integrity, be faithful in doing penance for our sins, and may we be zealous in seeking indulgences for all the faithful departed, so that, one day, we may all be united together with God in the glory of Heaven. Amen!