

# Father's Notes

*November 17, 2024*

Why do we pray for the dead? Because we want for them, what God has always wanted for them: to be in heaven. Aren't they there already? We simply don't know, so we must pray. It's an important and privileged responsibility. For whatever way we cared for them in this life, and they cared for us, praying for the soul of our deceased loved ones becomes our new way of caring for them.

Why do we tend to say that they're already in heaven? I believe it's because we want to honor them, but also because it brings us comfort. So, if we can't definitively know they're in heaven, what do we know? That God desires them to be in heaven. Let that be your hope.

In the Bible, there are some concepts that are described, yet not explicitly named. We've retroactively assigned a name, enabling us to more easily speak about it and understand. One example is the Holy Trinity. Another is purgatory (see Catechism, paragraphs 1030-1032). For example, in his First Letter to the Corinthians (3:10-15), St. Paul speaks of our receptivity to the life of grace throughout our lives, using the analogy of building on the foundation that is Christ. He describes that there will come a time when what we've built will be tested by fire. He then says, "But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire."

Another example is from 2 Maccabees (12:39-45), describing how Judas Maccabeus and his fellow soldiers buried the bodies of their fallen companions. Then they prayed that the sins of the dead might be "blotted out". You may have noticed that at every Mass we pray for the souls in purgatory. Each Eucharistic Prayer phrases it differently (e.g. "To our departed brothers and sisters and to all who were pleasing to you at their passing from this life, give kind admittance to your kingdom...." [EP III]).

Properly understood, purgatory speaks of God's prevailing mercy, overcoming our failure to fully give ourselves over to Him in this lifetime. Conversion is difficult on this side of death. It involves suffering of sorts. Likewise, it will likely not be without suffering on the other side of death, as God goes to work, refining us in His love, into the beautiful image he always intended for us. "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him.... Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

For the dead we pray: Eternal rest grant unto them, Lord....And let perpetual light shine upon them.



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