

## Homily for All Souls Day, November 2, 2008

Wisdom 3:109

Romans 5:5-11

John 14:1-6

At the heart of all our worship as Catholic Christians,  
we pause to remember...

We remember Christ, and all he did for us;  
we remember how he suffered, died and rose for us;  
and in word and sacrament,  
we remember what he did at table with his friends  
on the night before he died.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, then,  
we remember someone who has died: our brother, Jesus.

And every time we celebrate the Eucharist  
we remember others who have died, too.

You know the words as well as I do:

*Remember our brothers and sisters*

*who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again;  
bring them and all the departed into the light of your presence...*

We remember all our brothers and sisters in Christ  
and not only them but all the departed - everyone who has died -  
and we pray that through the mercy and love of God  
every one of them will enjoy the light and peace of God, forever.

Of course, when we pray for those who have died  
we remember first those whom we loved the most,  
those whom we miss the most.

When I pray the remembrance of the dead,  
my heart seldom fails to remember my mother and father:  
others, too - but always them.

I'm sure there are names that come to your heart, too.  
And we pray for them...

But *why* do we pray for them? *What* do we pray for them?

Our knowledge of human frailty and our faith in God's mercy  
teach us that when we die, God might not be quite yet finished  
with fashioning us, making us ready for eternal life.

Our whole life on earth is a journey to the dwelling place  
Christ has prepared and reserved for us in his Father's house.  
Sometimes we stay right on the path that leads us home  
and sometimes we take short cuts or make detours  
or even turn around and walk in the other direction!

We need the Lord to shepherd us from death into life...

So it might be, it might even be likely,

that at the end of our life our rough edges  
might need some buffing and polishing.  
The Church has long taught that after death,  
those not quite ready for heaven  
may need some further purification.  
This has sometimes been called purgatory.  
But we might have a false picture of purgatory.  
It's not some "flaming concentration camp on the outskirts of hell."\*  
It's not God's last chance to make us suffer!

St. Catherine spoke beautifully of the fire of purgatory  
as "God's love burning the soul until it was wholly aflame  
-- with the love of God."

It's like the fire we just heard of from the book of Wisdom:  
"As gold in the furnace, God will prove us, purify us,  
and take us to himself... we shall shine...  
and we shall abide forever with God in love..."  
If there is pain in purgatory,  
it is the pain of longing to be with God,  
to be worthy of the heaven Jesus won for us.

And so we pray for those who have gone before us  
that God bring to completion the good work begun in their lives  
while they were still with us.  
We cannot know how or even if time is measured in this purification.  
Perhaps one day, one hour, one minute on our clocks  
of finally and fully realizing the greatness of God's love for us  
and how unloving in return we often were,  
perhaps one second will be all it takes to purify us  
of the sins of taking God's love and the love of others for granted.

When we remember those who have died  
some of us might recall those who hurt and harmed in this life.  
Nothing is impossible for God.  
We can pray for these, too, entrusting them to God  
who knows how to make even the hardest of hearts ready for his mercy.

Of course, many of those whom we remember on All Souls Day  
were long ago perfected by God's mercy  
and welcomed to their places in heaven  
We remember and pray for them, too.

Today, and through this month of November, we remember them all:  
- those who were buried from our parish in this past year  
and whose names are on the scrolls on either side of the altar;  
- those whose names you will inscribe in the Book of Remembrance;  
- those whose pictures you post in the Gathering Room;  
- and the ones whose memory we carry in our hearts and our prayers

as we come to the table and remember  
*those who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again; and all the departed...*

And we remember Jesus, our brother, who died for us and rose  
and opened the door to his Father's house  
and prepared for each of us a dwelling place of peace.

\*Leonard Foley, OFM

*-Rev. Austin Fleming*