November 2nd: The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed

Gospel text (*Lk* 23:33.39-43): When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"

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Today, the Gospel calls forth Christianity’s most significant deed: the death and resurrection of Jesus. Today, we also make the Good Thief's plea: “Jesus, remember me” (Lk 23:42). “At the Lord's Table we do not commemorate martyrs in the same way that we do others who rest in peace so as to pray for them, but rather that they may pray for us that we may follow in their footsteps” —St. Augustine said in one of his Sermons. At least once a year, we Christians wonder what is the sense of life and what is that of our death and resurrection. It is on All Souls' day, which St. Augustine has separated from All Saints' Day.

Mankind’s sufferings are the same as those of the Church and, without any doubt, they both believe that all human suffering means somehow the loss of life. This is why the loss of a dearest one provokes such an unbearable pain that not even faith may alleviate it. Thus, men have always desired to bestow honors on their departed ones. Memory is, in fact, one way to make present those who are no longer by our side, to perpetuate their life. But time makes our remembrances of their psychological and social mechanisms fade gradually. Yet, if from a strictly human point of view this can drive us to be anguished, as Christians, thanks to the resurrection, we may have peace. The advantage of our believing in the resurrection is that it allows us to trust that, despite our oblivion, we shall meet again in the other life.

A second advantage is that, by remembering the deceased, we also pray for them. We do it from the bottom of our heart, through our intimacy with God, and each time we pray together in the Eucharist: in

front of the mystery of death and life, we are not alone but we share it as members of Christ's Body. Even more so: we see the Cross, suspended between Heaven and Earth, and we know that a communion between us and our departed loved ones has been established. Hence, as St. Francis gratefully proclaimed: “Praise to You, O Lord our God, for our Sister Death.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "Why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them." (Saint John Chrysostom)

- "We will finally be clothed in the joy, peace and love of God, completely, without any limit, and we will come face to face with Him! It is beautiful to think of this, to think of Heaven. We will all be there together. It is beautiful, it gives strength to the soul. (Francis)

- "Communion with the dead. "In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them." Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 958)