

The Holy Souls

By the Reverend Franklin Joiner

God's gift of eternal life to us His children begins here and now. He bestows it upon us first in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. You and I are now in the way of eternal life. We are in the process of being saved, and that which God has begun in us, He will perform until the day of Jesus Christ. The saints in glory and the holy souls in their place of purgation are still partaking of the same life; we are one with them and they are one with us, all of us together, living brothers and sisters in the household of the Church.

We ask the prayers of the saints in glory quite as naturally as we ask the prayers of our friends here on earth; and we pray for the faithful departed with the same assurance that God's blessing can and will reach them as when we say our prayers for our relatives and friends who are still living with us here in the Church militant. Until we realize fully the fact that our life in God begins here and now, and continues through the Church Expectant into the Church Triumphant, we do not have a right understanding of the Catholic Faith and the Communion of Saints in which we express our belief every time we recite the Creeds.

The Catholic Church comprises the saints in glory and the holy souls as well as ourselves, and that which God has begun in us at the Font of Baptism, He is continuing through His further gifts of grace and sacrament in the Church Militant. But that work is not finished when we come to die. There is no miracle in death, there is no spiritual metamorphosis in the act of dying, that suddenly completes God's work of redemption in us. He continued to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, until we come to stand in the very Presence of the Beatific Vision, and even then our heavenly service with the saints and angels is performed in the grace and the strength that God continues to give.

We see the saints in glory as an evidence of God's triumphant power and grace. Their salvation is complete. It is their great joy and privilege now to give and to share. There is nothing more we can do for them. But there is much they can do for us. But with the holy souls, with whom we are particularly concerned in this tract, it is very different. It has not been revealed what they may be able to do for us who are still in the Church on earth, but it has been revealed what we can do for them. There are very few references in the Bible to the state and condition of the faithful

departed. What we know and believe has been revealed to the great Masters and Teachers of the Faith by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, who, our Blessed Lord has assured us, will lead and guide His Church into all truth. We believe that the holy souls are conscious of their continued membership in the Church Catholic, and of their ultimate triumph with the saints about the throne of God. So we know that purgatory cannot be a place of sorrow and gloom and defeat. It is a place of further growth and development in the life of the spirit, where the progress of growth has been predetermined by the voluntary effort that each soul has made in the Church on earth. What pain and sorrow and suffering the holy souls know and feel is due largely to the realization of their wilful failures here below. There is little they can do for themselves now; they must wait for the working of God's grace, to receive their completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

But it is revealed that we can do a great deal for the holy souls. They are helped on their heaven-ward way by our prayers and especially by the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, which every time it is pleaded at the altar confers infinite merit upon both the living and the departed. It is both a duty and a privilege to remember the holy dead. And by so doing we shall not only be helping them, but we shall be laying up merit for ourselves against that day when we shall be where they are now.