

All Souls' Day and the Communion of Saints

If we were asked, "Do you have a soul?", chances are most of us would have no problem answering yes.

If we were asked, "Are you a saint?", chances are many of us would pause, and do some real 'soul' searching.

In November, both of these questions are afforded some significance. We start with the celebration of All Hallows' Eve (Hallowe'en), continue with All Saints' Day, and finish with All Souls' Day.

Our focus in this newsletter is All Souls' Day, and its connection with the Communion of Saints.

All Souls' Day, November 2, is set as a day when we officially remember the souls of the faithful departed. We believe that for an untold number of people, they die with the taint of sin still on their souls, and thus they wind up in Purgatory. By offering up prayers and other works to God on their behalf, we act in solidarity with them. We hope that our prayers will more speedily make up for their sins, and usher them into heaven more quickly.

All Souls' Day, although it doesn't get the same amount of press as its more flamboyant and glamorous cousins (Hallowe'en and All Saints Day), is still a beautiful reminder that we are connected in profound ways with those who have died in body, but remain very much alive in Spirit. It's also a reminder that our prayers have a real effect on others in God's plan for the salvation of all.

However, the story doesn't there. It's all woven into our belief in the Communion of Saints. Our catechism is very clear on this point. In article 946, we read, "The communion of saints *is* the Church." We believe that we are one in Spirit, united together in the Body of Christ: all of us, whether living or dead, on earth, in Purgatory, or in Heaven. We on earth pray for those in Purgatory. The saints, in turn, intercede for us on earth. The catechism, again, in article 956, states, "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven...do not cease to intercede with the Father for us...so by their...concern our weakness is greatly helped."

The circle of prayer comes around: we pray *for* the souls in purgatory, and we ask the saints in heaven to intercede *for us* on earth.

All of us are united in this faith. We are baptized into the Body of Christ. We are in communion with one another, on various stages of our pilgrimages, the final destination being sainthood and eternal life together in heaven.

We can all deal with the 'souls' part: we are all sinners in need of forgiveness.

Perhaps this year we can all try to deal with the 'saints' part a bit more: that we are destined for a life beyond our imaginings, fully alive in Christ and in fellowship with all others eternally in heaven. Perhaps we could make a resolution to live our present lives more in tune with this reality, and if we don't think we're up to the task by ourselves, we can always ask our saintly sisters and brothers for a helping hand!

Ken Bracke, Consultant, Religious Education Services
Edmonton Catholic Schools

November, 2009