

FEAST OF ALL SOULS 2014 Theme: Pray for Us!

When I was in the eighth grade up at St. Joseph Grade School, on All Souls Day Sr. Anselm told our class to go over to the church and pray for the souls in Purgatory.

Now we all had been taught that every time we went into church and said three Our Fathers, three Hail Marys and three Glory Bes on this day we would get a plenary indulgence that would free a poor soul from Purgatory.

Well, with all seriousness and determination we forty eighth graders set about saying those three sets of three prayers and running in and out of the church as fast as we could.

We imagined that poor souls were popping out of Purgatory like corn out of a hot pot of popping corn with the lid removed.

We could not understand why every member of the church wasn't there with us, saying the prayers, going in and out of the church, trying to free every poor soul from Purgatory.

Now fifty years later and having just last year experienced the death of my father, gone through the deaths of beloved grandparents and aunts and uncle, countless friends and parishioners, I find that I do not pray for the dead.

I remember my beloved dead, sometimes with tears, sometimes with laughter, most often with love.

But almost never in prayer.

The reason I believe is that opening line of the reading from the Book of Wisdom: **“The souls of the just are in the hand of God.”**

I am convinced that when we who believe, especially we who are baptized into and live the life of Jesus Christ, die we pass over into the hand of the God who raised Jesus from death.

Whatever else happens at death, we do not know but that we are in the hand of God, that we know.

And that is enough.

Now I know the church of the past developed a whole doctrine of Purgatory and Indulgences, and taught these strenuously for centuries.

And I am not here to contradict or criticize any of these.

Well, I do criticize the magical idea that three sets of three prayers said on a particular day of the year every time you enter a church building could pop a poor soul loose from a place of suffering and pain into the peace of heaven:

Sounds childish and silly.

However, Purgatory and Indulgences do not play a role in contemporary theology or spirituality and can, I believe, be left on the periphery of our thinking.

Rather let us focus instead on the word of God: **“The souls of the just are in the hand of God.”**

Today we remember all our beloved dead and where they are.

We, on this side of death, do not know the details of what has become of them, of how they now live, of what they do.

All we know is they are **“in the hand of God.”**

And because they are, perhaps instead of praying for them, maybe we should this All Souls Day ask them to pray for us!