

Companions on the Journey

October31, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Tomorrow we begin the month of November. Certain months seem to carry a certain characterization or description. Perhaps the month is colored by the time of the year, the particular season or a great feast that always occurs that month. November is no exception.

For many years, in the Catholic tradition, November begins with back-to-back feast days. The Feast of All Saints (which is often a Holy Day although not this year) and the feast of All Souls. The Saints point us in the direction of heaven, the kingdom of God which has broken into our world in the person of Jesus Christ. In God's economy we are all destined for life in the everlasting kingdom created and sustained by God our Heavenly Father.

The Feast of All Souls points us to the reality of Purgatory which is still the most misunderstood of Catholic teachings. Occasionally you will hear people say that the Church "made purgatory up." Not so. At the moment of death there is a judgment, a preliminary judgment, an immediate judgment. God decides in that moment, in and through the person of Jesus Christ whether you will spend eternity in the embrace of the Father and in the bosom of all the other saints or you will cast down into the fires of hell with the enemy and all his minions. That is the Particular Judgement. Heaven or hell.

If the judgment is for hell then you are transported there in a nanosecond. If the judgment is for heaven, there is another aspect that enters in. Are you ready? Ready? Yes, ready. Well, you ask, who wouldn't be ready for heaven? Good question. But think now. Think of the eternal bliss of heaven, think of the Beatific Vision. Think of the virtues which inhabit the kingdom. Think of the most transcendent of lights. Are you ready simply to move in there? Is there anything which you are still clinging to which is not in full harmony with kingdom life? Any unforgiveness, any envious thoughts, any arrogance, any anger, anything you still cling to desperately, any lustful dimension in your heart, any dominating fear? Any lack of caring about others, any hatred of others or a particular type of person or member of an ethnic group or racial group? At the Gates of Heaven we will have to cross the threshold. Can we? Are we ready to? Or, might it be that there are still some things that the Lord needs to work on to remove from our lives and thus render us ready to enter the kingdom so that we are not overwhelmed or crushed or blinded by the experience rather than being exalted by the experience?

Jesus wants us to be ready and He will get us ready. He will put just the right wedding garment on us but it may take a little doing. We will not be able to do it for ourselves or by ourselves. It will be done unto us. Others can pray for us and ask the Lord to refashion us. That is why we pray for the souls in purgatory. Those souls know they are going to heaven. There is no doubt. They just can't wait to get there. They yearn to enter and that yearning, graced by God, purifies whatever holds them back from being fully ready. When they are ready, the gates open and they enter as valued and purified members of the Body of Christ, living with him forever.

The end of November is characterized by the great national feast of Thanksgiving. It is fitting as a conclusion for us too. Called to be saints, or purified for life in the kingdom, our hearts are full of gratitude for such a loving God. Happy November!

Peace,
Msgr. McHenry