

Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed A reflection

The Catechism describes Purgatory as the “final stage of purification of the elect,” and makes the point that this purification “is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.”

Purgatory can thus be described as “an initial stage of heavenly glory, suited to those who are saints but who need a moment to adjust their garments—that is, the good deeds in which they are dressed—before making their entrance into the wedding banquet which lasts forever.”

The Catechism clarifies why Purgatory is needed: “Every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death, in the state called Purgatory.”

The purification of Purgatory is “punishment”. But *the Catechism* tells us that it “must not be thought of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin.” It is rather, self-inflicted punishment, which, in God’s mercy, is purifying or healing.

The practice of prayer and penance which marks the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed and, indeed, the month of November, deepens our solidarity with those who have died. In the words of St John Paul 11, “Just as in their earthly life believers are united in the one Mystical Body, so after death those who live in a state of purification experience the same ecclesial solidarity which works through prayer and love for their brothers and sisters in the faith.”

Finally this Commemoration can renew our trust that God in Christ, offers us in time, the healing and purification that the faithful departed, for whom we pray, experience in eternity.

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