



THE NEW SHOFAR

Our hearts were made for You, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in you (St. Augustine of Hippo).

November

6

All Souls Day – Why do we pray for those who have died?

The simple answer to this can be found in our liturgical prayers: *For all those who departed this life in the certain hope of the resurrection, in thanksgiving let us pray to the Lord.* The important word here is the word *for*. We are not praying *to* the dead, but *for* the dead and *along with* the dead. Our first duty is to pray *for* those who have died. Because *for those who have died life is changed and not ended* they remain very much a part of our Christian family. They have *died and gone before us marked with the sign of faith* but that is not the end of their lives as part of the Church. Their relationship is *changed not ended*. Of course, they have no power to do anything more than plead to the Father, through the Son on our behalf. Judgment rests with the Father, and the Father alone but He is *our* Father, the Lord of the living and the dead and so the object of all prayers and works. Like the woman in the parable of Luke 18:1-8, Jesus encourages His disciples to pray unceasingly to God that divine justice may be done. His disciples wherever they may be.

Those who have died in faith are the Church Triumphant

The Church triumphant is the name given to that part of the church that is now *resting from its labours* in glory, those who have died in Christ. They are formed by God into the Church Triumphant, those who *have fought the good fight of faith, finished their course, and received a crown of righteousness from the Lord (2 Tim. 4:7-8).*

We call them the *Church Triumphant* but that should not suggest to us that the church on earth is *not* already triumphant in the battle of faith. Those of us who are still fighting the battle, suffering and struggling here, are *more than conquerors through Him who loved us* (Rom. 8:37). *Christ* has definitively *triumphed gloriously over his enemies*, death, sin and Satan, and totally defeated them. We are victorious in Him.

That needs emphasis today: Christ is not *waiting* to be crowned King of kings. He *is* crowned with glory and honour at God's right hand (Heb. 2:9) and rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2). Even while the battle is still being fought, we *already have the victory with him and fight a defeated enemy.*

We refer especially to the saints in glory as the **church triumphant** because they have entered into the *full enjoyment* of the victory. While we continue the struggle, they rest from their labours (Rev. 14:13). While we must still wear the armour of faith, they have

put it aside and are clothed in white (Rev. 3:5). Their *tears are wiped away and there is for them no more death or sorrow or crying or pain* (Rev. 21:4).

The **church militant** refers to the Church on earth. It refers to an evangelistic reality: the Church on earth works to overcome the imperfect and sinful dimensions of human existence. The Church's mission is not to oppose the world and society, but to work for their transformation by the preaching of the Gospel and by the edifying witness of the good works and example of those who are baptized into Christ. The Church's best asset is the saintly activity and example of those who have chosen the Christian way of life.

This is the mission the Church Triumphant shares in Christ

Our God is not a God of the dead but the living. We celebrate this feast because those who have died in Christ are not dead but live. Today, we remember that Christ's Church not only includes the saints on earth but also the *saints* in heaven. This means that whenever and wherever the Church gathers on this side of heaven, we see only the tiniest fraction of her. This is because most of the saints have already passed through this vale of tears and are now in God's eternal presence. We, the saints here on earth, are in the minority. We're just a small fraction of all the Christians who have ever lived.

When we realize this--that we are but a tiny fraction of the Church--it should not fill us with sadness. To the contrary, such a truth comforts and encourages us. For when we gather to worship, there is more here than the earthly eye can see. With the eyes of faith, we discover that when we gather as God's people, it's never less than with all the saints of heaven.

So when we gather for worship, we are not the only ones present. The angels of heaven are with us. The spirits of the righteous made perfect are also with us (ie. the saints of heaven). But most of all, when we worship, Jesus is here. He is here with His body and blood, giving to us His new covenant of forgiveness.

The saints in heaven are not that distant and far away. The Book of Hebrews says: *They surround us. They are that magnificent "cloud of witnesses," worshiping with us and encouraging us to run the race of faith* (**Hebrews 12:1**). And by God's grace, we will one day join that triumphant-victory celebration without end. All the saints gather as one, standing before the throne of God and the Lamb, clothed in white garments, living Christ's cross-won victory to its fullness. They chant aloud: *We are saved by our God who sits on the throne and by the Lamb!*

Yet, others also join the saints in worshiping the Blessed Trinity: the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures. That heavenly choir sings: *Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power, and might be to our God to the ages of the ages! Amen!* That is the liturgy of heaven and of earth. It is what we celebrate this day. As it is heaven, so it is on earth. Here, on earth, Jesus is present to bless us with His words of

pardon and peace. He is here with His body, and also with His blood, to give us His forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. That is God's Church – in heaven and on earth.