

The Promise of Immortality: Celebrating All Saints and All Souls

by Jem Sullivan, Ph.D.

On the Solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of All Souls we are invited to ponder with the eyes of faith the mystery of time, eternity, and death itself. These liturgical celebrations remind us that the human desire for immortality is concerned with not only our physical bodies. Immortality is a spiritual reality made concrete in the lives of the saints and the souls who precede us in faith.

On the first two days of November, the Church celebrates God's promise of immortality in Jesus Christ.

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Saints as Exemplary Christian Disciples

The Solemnity of All Saints, celebrated each year on November 1, recalls the Catholic tradition of looking to saints as models of faith and as intercessors on the faith journey.

In connecting catechesis to the Church's liturgical rhythms of feasts and fasts, catechists recall the particular saint of each day. The liturgical year offers catechists a continuous cycle of inspiration in the lived witness of individual holy men and women who are daily reminders of our baptismal call to holiness.

One day in the Church's calendar is given to celebrating the entire company of saints as a community of exemplary disciples of Christ. Taken together, this great assembly of the "holy ones" gives catechists the opportunity to highlight the many ways in which human potential has and can be transformed by God's grace. The Communion of Saints also offers a vision of Christian hope in eternal life—for the saints fulfill their human desire for immortal life in the eternal presence of God.

Remembering the Faithful Departed

The commemoration of All Souls Day is rooted in the Christian conviction that death is not the final word on the human condition. The search for immortality finds its true end only in God.

So we, the living, are called in love to accompany with prayer those who have died and are now being purified to stand in the presence of God. To prepare for All Souls Day, invite special moments of remembrance of lost loved ones. Such prayerful remembrance brings consolation in separation and loss.

Catechists can encourage students to recognize that grief is the other side of love. And the eternal side of human love is the love of God.

In preparing to mark All Saints and All Souls, catechists can find in these resources and activities some practical ways to encourage reflection on the lives of the saints and prayerful remembrance of all souls.

* Draw on the stories of the lives of American saints found in the opening section of each chapter of the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. Discuss how these holy men and women show us concrete paths to live the gospel today.

* Purchase copies of Pope Benedict XVI's *The Saints* (Spiritual Thoughts Series) to distribute to students. Focus on one or more of the saints featured in this book to invite reflection on the call to holiness addressed to every Christian.

* Encourage year-round study of the lives of the saints by compiling a list of classic writings of well-known saints such as St. Augustine's *Confessions*, St. Catherine of Siena's *The Dialogue*, and *The Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales.

* Create a Book of Remembrance in which students write personal prayers for lost loved ones. On All Souls Day, place this book in church as a way to join these personal prayers with the Mass for All Souls.

* Distribute prayer cards, such as the "Prayer for the Dead," that commends souls to the loving mercy of God.

We reflect on the lives of the saints in order to better imitate their example. We remember souls to find consolation and strength to live a life worthy of God. Both liturgical celebrations are catechetical moments that recall that any human life open to God's grace can be transformed into a living reflection of Christ in this world and in the life to come.

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