

- Today, my friends, is a beautiful day of prayer for Catholics around the world. While it is the day that we remember our deceased loved ones, it is also a day in which we are called to meditate on the gift of eternal life.
- And so while the vestment I wear is black to symbolize our mourning for the dead, it is trimmed in silver to remind us that in our mourning, we are called all the more to bear witness to our hope in the resurrection of all men.
- Throughout the course of our 2000 years of history, the Catholic Church has always recognized the pastoral necessity of praying for the deceased as a means of helping them on their way to Heaven.
- Yesterday at Mass I spoke a bit about purgatory, and I mentioned how purgatory is not so much a place of punishment, but rather is a manifestation of God's great love and mercy for us.
- While it's true that the souls in purgatory suffer, it is so they can be perfected and thus prepared for the joys of Heaven!
- I also mentioned that purgatory is necessary for those of us who have maintained a spiritual friendship with God and desire to be in union with Him, but who have failed to make sufficient reparation for our sins or who still harbor some attachment to sin.
- As Catholics it is of utmost importance that we realize the utter devastation of sin, even those little sins that we think no one notices.
- Yesterday I mentioned how God has an image of who He wants us to be in this life. But sin makes us less than who we are called to be. It deforms our natural goodness and strips us of our dignity as people made in God's image and likeness.
- Moreover, all sin separates us from God and from one another. It weakens the love we have for God, and in the case of mortal sin, it actually destroys that love for God within us.
- Our Lord, who loves us in infinite fashion, shows us nothing but love and benevolence throughout our lives. And sin is a rejection of His love; and therefore every sin is an injustice against God.
- In order to help correct this injustice, we must do penance to make reparation for our sins. That's why a priest gives us a penance whenever we go to confession.
- Furthermore, throughout our lives we should seek constantly to make reparation for our sins. And this is why traditionally the Church has encouraged Catholics to give up meat on Fridays, and why the Church asks us to fast during Lent.
- These acts of sacrifice are a means for us to make reparation for our sins, to correct the injustice we've committed against God. Pences also help to break our attachments to sin.
- If at the time of our death we are in a state of grace and not in a state of mortal sin, but still have not made sufficient reparation for our sins, our Lord allows us to be purified in the fires of purgatory so that whatever sin remains within us may be burned away.
- I think a helpful analogy is to think of a bride on her wedding day. Every bride goes to great lengths to be as beautiful as she can be for her bridegroom on her wedding day.
- In the same way, purgatory is like the morning of our eternal wedding day. The suffering that we undergo in purgatory is how we are prepared for our bridegroom and the wedding feast of Heaven!
- However, as Catholics we believe that we cannot do anything to help ourselves once we are in purgatory. Therefore, we must rely on the prayers of others to help purify us.

- We do this in a primary way at funeral Masses. You see, my friends, the primary purpose of a funeral Mass is to pray for the repose of the soul of the deceased person. The prayers of every funeral Mass are geared toward this intention.
- Catholics are also encouraged to have Masses offered for their loved ones, and many of you are very faithful to this practice.
- But we also have All Souls Day, which is the day set aside each year to pray for all the dead. This is the way the Church ensures that all the poor souls in purgatory are receiving prayers.
- This day occurs right after All Saints Day in order to highlight the connection between the three states in which the Church exists.
- Yesterday we honored all of the saints in heaven, and as Catholics we believe that there is a very real bond that exists between us who are living on earth and the saints in heaven. The communion of the faithful does not dissolve simply because some of the faithful die.
- As Catholics we believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ: those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven.
- We believe that together we all form one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the saints are always attentive to our prayers. They forever intercede for us from Heaven for our good and the good of the entire Church, and we refer to them as the Church Triumphant.
- But at the present time some of our Lord's disciples are pilgrims on earth. This is us, the Church Militant. Others have died and are being purified in purgatory, and we refer to them as the Church Suffering.
- Just as the Church Triumphant prays for us, the Church Militant, so too must we, the Church Militant, pray for the Church Suffering so that they may become the Church Triumphant.
- Our prayers, sacrifices and penances can greatly aid the souls in purgatory, and thus the Church instituted today's feast for that very purpose.
- And so, my friends, we meditate today on God's promise of eternal life for those who love Him, and pray that all those who have gone before us may obtain the pardon of their sins, the help of God's grace, and life everlasting.
- Let us assist the deceased with our prayers, and let us also pray that when we die our hope for eternal life may be fulfilled as well! *Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them! Amen.*