

The Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, Year C

GOSPEL

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All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.'

(John 6:37–40)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- This text occurs within the context of the Bread of Life discourse: Jesus' teaching on his real presence in the Eucharist.
- The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (the Feast of All Souls) is connected with the Catholic teaching on Purgatory, 'the final purification' that prepares us for the joy of heaven (CCC 130).
- Although the practice of praying for the dead is an ancient one, it was St Odilo of Cluny, a Benedictine monk, who first set aside a special day of prayer for the faithful departed for his abbey in Cluny, France.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text is characteristic of the Gospel of John. Jesus reiterates on multiple occasions the unity between he and the Father. Here, he stresses their absolute unity of will: he desires what his Father desires, that all who come to him be raised to eternal life. He opens our eyes to a much bigger reality to do with salvation: it is not a matter of dumb chance, but always the work of the Father. It is the Father who draws us towards his Son, and the Son, extravagant with his grace, turns nobody away. Immediately before these verses, however, Jesus tells the crowd following him that even though they have seen and heard him, they still do not believe (Jn 6:36). Although the Father draws people, he never forces them; his work is never at the expense of our freedom. Our task is to always open ourselves to God's will. In a mysterious way, by purifying our hearts to completely embrace God's will, we lose nothing of our freedom, nothing of our individuality, of who we truly are. We find only life in its fullness—life eternal.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever struggled to do the will of another person, either in your family (like a parent) or at work? Share why, and what that was like.
- Have you experienced the death of somebody close to you before? If you are comfortable, share how this affected your perspective on life.
- Christian hope is for 'eternal life'. Reflect on and talk about what you think 'eternal life' means.
- This week, think about how you might reorder your priorities with the knowledge that the ultimate purpose of your life is joyful communion with God.
- Pray the words of the psalm regularly this week:
The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

The practice of not only burying but praying for the dead has been a universal mainstay of human culture and religion throughout history. Many tombs of the early Christians bear inscriptions explicitly asking for prayers for their passage to eternal life. For this reason, it is an old practice that whenever passing a cemetery we pray these simple words: 'May the Divine Assistance remain always with us and may the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.' We do not approach death with despair or dread, however; a healthy reverence, perhaps, but never despair. We approach trusting in the extravagant hope Jesus himself held out to us: 'whoever comes to me, I shall not turn him away' (Jn 6:37).

- Explore the relevant sections of the Catechism of the Catholic Church that explain the Church's teaching on Purgatory—the 'final purification of the elect' (CCC 130).
- What are some practices we can engage in to help prepare us for eternal life?
- Emphasise the importance of regularly bringing to bear the souls of those who have already died.
- How can we more practically live in sync with the will of the Father?

NOTES

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting
Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and
environment

- You could pray the prayer of surrender together, by St Ignatius of Loyola:
- Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me. Amen.
- You could light some candles together and ask everybody to remember in silent prayer their loved ones, or those on their heart, who have died.