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Monthly Spiritual Message

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THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

As Franciscans, we have a rich legacy of Saints belonging to our Franciscan family. We honour all the known and unknown Franciscan Saints on November 29. As well, November 3 is when we pray for all the deceased of the Franciscan Family. As a fraternity, do we have any Masses or prayers planned to offer for our departed brothers and sisters? Do we seek to learn from the example of our Franciscan Saints? How do they call us to live the Gospel today as Franciscans?

Why do we ask the Saints to pray for us? Why do we pray for the dead? Through prayer, we grow in our relationship with the Holy Trinity, and respond to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in our souls. We grow in closer union with Christ and in communion with all Christ's Mystical Body – God's family, the Church. This family of God includes all members of the Church, whether in Heaven, in Purgatory or on earth. Hence we recite in the Creed, "I believe in the Communion of Saints."

Since Jesus Christ has only one Body and since death has no power to separate us from Our Lord (Rom 8:38), those who are being purified in Purgatory by God's love (1 Cor 3:12-15) are still members of the Mystical Body of Christ just as are the blessed in Heaven.

Our Lord said that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:39). The Saints in heaven love us more intensely than they ever could on earth as their love has been perfected through Christ. They pray for us constantly (Rev 5:8) and their prayers are powerful (Jas 5:16).

Our prayers to the Saints in Heaven, asking their intercession for us with the Father, do not undermine Christ's role as our Mediator, but rather affirm the care of the Church in heaven for those of us on earth. They pray for us in accordance with the Will of God, that all that is given to us will assist us to come to salvation when we finish this race on earth, as St Paul reminds us.

St Paul urges us (1 Tim 2:1-4) "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for this is pleasing to God our Saviour." All the members of the Body of Christ are called to pray for one another. Our Lady, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church, has a relationship to each of us, as given to her by Jesus on the Cross, and she constantly intercedes for us, that we may receive the new wine of Divine Mercy.

Let us remember to pray for one another, especially for our departed brothers and sisters.

Unfortunately, many Catholics have forgotten this spiritual work of mercy to pray for the deceased, or they have developed a too casual attitude towards death and eternity. You can see this attitude at funeral Masses where the importance of offering the Mass for the departed loved one is neglected and the most important element seems to be the celebration of his or her life.

Yes, we give thanks to God for their life, but we neglect our duty to help them in their journey of purification by our prayers for the repose of their soul. (The requirement of purgatory, of course, is only known to God). It seems to be an attitude of presumption rather than Christian hope, for us to canonize our loved ones at funerals and to neglect to pray for their eternal repose.

Let us remember to pray for our dead and ask the Saints in Heaven, especially our Franciscan Saints, to intercede for us so that we will grow in our love of Christ and of our neighbour.

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