

All Souls Day

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September 11, 2001 is embedded in our memory as Americans. In the sad days that followed the events in Manhattan, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania, *The New York Times*, seeking to respect and honor all who had lost their lives, made a commitment to highlight individuals who had died that tragic day. In the weeks that followed, tiny snapshots of people appeared in the *Times*, capturing the minds and hearts of Americans across the nation. There was something mysteriously inspiring about the portraits: affectionately recounted stories, acts of kindness, expressions of love. "Never before" wrote Jack Bogdanski, professor at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland Oregon, "in my forty-plus years as a reader, have I been moved to close my eyes, place my palm on the page of the newspaper, shed a tear and say a prayer." (Collected Portraits of Grief, New York Times, Times Books, 2002)

I offer this experience as we reflect on All Souls Day. While birth and death are perhaps the most common life experiences, they are also among the most intimate and personal. Giving up one's life, whether expected or unexpected, is heart-rending for each person and for their loved ones and one's life's story, lovingly retold after their death, can move even strangers to heartfelt sympathy. For the Catholic community, All Souls Day offers us a similar moment ---a celebration of memory, you might say, in which we can actively call to mind our beloved dead. These memories are filled with recollections of our "holy ones", those who have gone ahead of us: our family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, even our fellow companions on this life journey. As we lovingly remember them, we celebrate their goodness and encourage one other to be mindful of God's tender promises of faithful, steadfast love of each of us--- into eternal life.

Today's Scriptures urge us to trust that unfailing goodness and fidelity of our God, to have confidence in Jesus' teaching and to believe in his promise of eternal life. Listen to the readings: "*The souls of the just are in the hands of God...they are in peace.*", "*The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want*", "*...hope does not disappoint...*" and finally, "*For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day.*" The Church offers a litany of hope today to all who mourn loved ones, reminding us that the daily process of dying and rising will come to completion when each of us finally passes through physical death and rise to eternal life. This is the hope we hold for ourselves and the hope we hold for all who have gone ahead of us in our faith community.

To remember with love, to recall poignant memories and reminiscences and to pray that our "holy ones" rest in the gentle and forgiving arms of God is at the heart of today's celebration. As we listen to Jesus, we take confidence in his words, "*And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it up on the last day.*"