

All Saints Day – Cycle B

November 1, 2009

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. We also begin the month of November. I thought it would be a good time to re-teach if you will what we believe about what happens after death. What we believe about what happens to each of us and those before us. Today of course we celebrate those who are in heaven but we believe there is only one Church, correct? Yes, but the Church is three different parts - the Church triumphant, the Church suffering, and the Church militant - one Church but three parts. The Church triumphant is the Church we celebrate today, the Church in heaven. All of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us, if you go to heaven you are a Saint. So everybody that is in heaven right now is Saints and they pray for us and they help us and they encourage us to go and be at goal one day that we too may be Saints. As Leon Bloy said years ago, "There is only one tragedy not to be a Saint." So that has got to be our goal. The second thing as a Church is the Church suffering and that is the Church in Purgatory which is the Church for this month, the month of November and we will talk about that more in a second. The Church militant is the ones who are fighting in the midst of the struggle right now and that is us.

So the day you and I drop dead then we go before God. The definition of death is when the soul separates from the body. Then our soul goes before God and there is what we call particular judgment. There are two judgments – particular is what happens to each of us the moment we die. And then the last judgment is when God judges the whole world and His justice is fulfilled and we see who goes to heaven, who goes to hell. But the particular judgment when you and I die we go before God and then God judges us and He sends us to one of three places – hell which hopefully none of us will do. But only one thing will get you to hell, what is that? Mortal sin. How many mortal sins does it take to get to hell? One. So think about that one mortal sin is enough to get you and I to hell. Missing mass on Sunday is a mortal sin people. Having sex outside of marriage is a mortal sin. Getting drunk on purpose, mortal sin. Beating your wife or husband, mortal sin. All of those things are one, just one time not repented is enough to separate us from God forever. And yet how many of us walk around in mortal sin and don't even think twice, don't even think twice. As the Holy Father said, "The lines for confession should be as long as the lines for communion." So that means we need to be people that whenever there is mortal sin in our lives we get rid of it instantly, perfectly and as soon as possible. That is why we always have confession before Mass so that if anyone is in mortal sin they get rid of it so they can get right with God. First thing.

The second thing that happens is you could go to Purgatory which most of us are going to go to. Everyone here probably is going to go to Purgatory, even though it is not God's will we go to Purgatory. A couple of weeks ago someone came into the office to buy tickets for the car. So I said something kiddingly about, "Oh, that is an extra hundred years in Purgatory." He didn't say anything to me because he probably knew me better, but under his breath he said to Cheryl, "There is no such thing. But whatever." You pagan. Come say that to me. If you are a Catholic you must believe in Purgatory. If you do not believe in purgatory you are not Catholic. You might as well go somewhere else. This is what we believe. This is what you must believe. You can't pick and choose what you are going to believe. You can't say, "Well, I believe in the Eucharist. And I believe in the Blessed Mother. But I don't believe in

Purgatory." Well you are wrong. You must believe in Purgatory. Some of you will believe it when you are there. It is not God's will for you and I to go to Purgatory, you know that. God wants us all to go to heaven. We will talk about that in a second. If you are in a state of grace, no mortal sin on your soul and you die you go before God and He sends you to Purgatory. Now Purgatory is the place of purgation. God is love and He is purifying your love. This pure love of God's is a burning love. So when you and I die, if we are in a state of grace but we are not perfectly purged yet, God embraces us and He draws Himself close to Himself. And as He draws us close to Himself, He burns away all of the selfishness that is still in us to make us people of perfect love. Now of course that means that someone like me is going to be there a long time. Someone like Fr. Fred will go right to heaven but that is another story. God is going to purge that time away. The more we sin the longer we stay in Purgatory. Even if you go to confession, your confession takes care of your sin, but there still has got to be the payment for that. Not the full payment. If you break the windows of my car, if you break one window and you come to me and say, "Father, I have broken the windows on your car," I will say, "That is okay. I forgive you." But guess what you are going to have to do? Pay for the window of my car. Let's say you break two windows, I won't send you to court, I won't hold anything against you, you are forgiven. But, in justice, you must pay for what you have done. The same when we come before God. That is why when a person dies we need to have Masses said for them. We need to pray for them. One of the things we do here in our church is we have this book of remembrance. So after Mass you come up and you put the names of people in your family who have died. You put your picture up here for the month of November. Then at every Mass in this church for the month of November we pray for them.

As I was a child my grandmother, she was a great woman, and she was a great prayerful person. Every week we would go to the Church of St. Patrick's in downtown Pittsburgh and the first thing we would do is light two, seven day candles. I remember looking at my grandmother and I have told this story before, "Grandmom, why do we do that?" And she would say one for her parents and two for the poor souls in Purgatory." And I said, "Why do we pray for the souls in Purgatory?" "Because if we pray for them and our prayers get them out of Purgatory, then they become saints. And what do they do, they pray for us." Fr. Wright has great devotion to the souls in Purgatory. Once a month he has this gathering for the poor souls. Are you a person who prays for the souls in Purgatory. If your family members have died do you pray for them? They are stuck there and they need your prayers because we can always unite with each other. They can't always pray for themselves. They are counting on you. That is why I brought the candles back next door in the adoration chapel outside there so we can do these type things. That is why we do these practices.

The last place you go of course is heaven. That is the will of God for all of us. Fr. Benedict loves to talk about, "Oh I'll be the last one in Purgatory mopping up the last after everybody is gone." That is not God's will. God wills that you and I go to heaven. That is why one of the biggest things we all need to pray for is what - a happy death. It is really how you die that matters, right. You can be a saint your whole life, a great, great saint, do all these great things, but commit one mortal sin before you die, not repent of it and go to hell. The opposite is also true. You can be a pagan your whole life. Bad, bad, bad, evil, evil, evil and yet right before you die you make a good confession, you get the rites of the Church, you repent of all your sins and you die and you go to heaven. We have proved this many times in the Scriptures. Who was the first one who went to heaven after Jesus? The good thief. "Well Father that just means I will be bad my whole life and then I will repent." Those who wait until the twelfth hour to repent usually die at 11:30. But that is all beside the point. You and I have got to desire sainthood. You pray for a happy death. Who is the patron of a happy death? Good St. Joseph. That is why over there we

have prayers for a happy death. Msgr. Gannon prayed for a happy death everyday of his life. And when he died here eight years ago, seven years ago, he had a great happy death. I knelt next to him. I said the Divine Mercy chaplet. I said, "Are you ready?" He was all ready. He died with so many of us priests giving him last rites. He was most ready. At the moment of death the Church gives a plenary indulgence if we get the last rites. That means full remission of sins. So objectively if you die with the last rites of the Church, you make a confession, you get the plenary indulgence, we give you viaticum, what happens when you die - right to heaven. You are a saint of God. So it is important we live our lives with that goal. It has got to be more than I don't want to go to hell. It has got to be that I want to be with Jesus. And Jesus will give us that great gift if that is our desire.

So is your desire in life to be a saint? Is your desire in life to be with God forever? Because if it is God will give you that desire. If it is not God will give you that desire. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.