All Souls Day 2026

All Souls' day is our annual day set aside for praying for the dead. It is a day of remembrance, many parishes especially remember those that they lost this last year, but more than that it's our day to pray for the souls in purgatory. If you listen to the prayers on All Souls' day, they are geared toward praying that the souls in purgatory reach their heavenly homeland. We remember that the church is not just those of us here on earth, it is also those in heaven, and those who are awaiting heaven.

There are many different readings that a presider can select for All Souls', but for the first time this year I opted for the gospel of the raising of Lazarus. For me it is one of the most powerful stories in the Bible. This is where we see John's literary artistry fully at work. None of the other evangelists gives us the same

long and resonant stories that John does, think of the story of the woman at the well, or the story of the man born blind, both masterpieces of depth and balance. But Lazarus hits a bit differently for me. We know of the sisters Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus, who were close friends of Jesus. Jesus gets a note which says that “the one that you love is ill.” And Jesus replies that this illness is not to end in death, and the disciples think that he means the physical illness, but it's not about physical illness, he's referring to a spiritual illness, a spiritual illness felt not just by Lazarus, but by all of us. Jesus is constantly trying to get people in the gospels to widen their perspective, whether it's the scribes and the Pharisees who see the work of the temple and the law too narrowly, or the Jewish people who want a political Messiah because they think that their principal struggle is with the Romans, or the crowds who love him because he gives them physical nourishment, their

scope is not wide enough. How true is that of us sometimes? If our scope isn't wide enough, we don't see the full ramifications of our words and actions. Maybe we don't see because we don't want to see.

Jesus, knowing that Lazarus is gravely ill, does not leave immediately, but rather he lingers for two more days. Why? Martha and Mary both have this question for him, and it seems like a very good one. We know that Jesus seems to have intended this precisely so that through the sign he is about to do God can be glorified, not just in the act itself but glorified by the larger reality that the sign itself points to, not just Lazarus being raised from the dead, but also Jesus's conquering of death through the cross. But Martha and Mary don't know this yet, and to them it must seem that Jesus delayed out of apathy. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." We can

hear a hint of remonstration in her tone. “Lord, if you had been here, this would not have happened. Why did you delay? Do you not care?” A question echoing down through history. Does God not care about our grief? Why doesn't God act? Mary falls at Jesus’s feet and is completely beside herself with grief. Anyone who has been in the house after a sudden death can feel the sorrow. Emily Dickinson’s line in The Bustle in the House the Morning After Death when she describes the sweeping up the heart and putting love away resonates with my experience, and I feel something of that in Mary here. The heart just shatters. And Jesus himself weeps. We get the sense that he weeps for Lazarus but also for the sequence of events that will be unleashed by the raising of Lazarus which will lead inexorably to his crucifixion. Jesus, as a human being, does not desire his own death, certainly not *that* death. But again, in consoling Martha, he reorients her scope and expectation. She does well to express her confidence

that God will raise Lazarus and her on the last day, but he wants her to focus not on what God will do later, but on who he, Jesus, is now. Hope is future-oriented in our firm conviction in our final union with God and our desire for that union, but it is also present-oriented. Hope gives us strength to continue moving forward during life's tragedies, and it also allows us to see the goods of this world in proper relationship to our final destiny. Hope allows us to put one foot in front of the other as we navigate moments when we have to sweep the heart up off the floor and it calls us to select well the goods that lead to ultimate beatitude. Remember last year's discussion of the beatitudes? Those who mourn are blessed when their sorrow for the impact of sin in the world leads to a detachment from the false consolations of the world and a wholesale and final trust in God. That's hope which allows us to sift through the many things which surround us and call for our attention and say yes to this

and no to that. Praying for others accomplishes in its own way both of the great commandments to love God and our neighbor. We turn to God in prayer because God always wants to hear the desires of our heart even though he knows them, but praying for the needs of others on days like All Souls' reminds us that we are still connected with those who have gone before us and we can still love them by acting toward their good, since we believe that our prayer for others does matter, it does make a difference. As the funeral liturgy reminds us, their lives have not ended, they have changed. And we still express our love and affection for them by praying for them as their soul prepares to receive beatitude by a purgation of its vestiges of sin and attachments, and all things which finally do not belong to God, which we all have. And with us as we pray (and sometimes still mourn), is our Lord, who wept at the grave of Lazarus, a high priest as Hebrews says who though perfect is not unable to sympathize

with us, and who says I am the resurrection and the life, so that with Saint Paul we can say, “O death where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”