

All Soul's Day – 2025 John 6:37-40

This is the first time that I recall **All Soul's Day being on a Sunday**. What a wonderful day, and I call it "Wonderful" because it is, since it is a celebration just as good as All Saints. The only difference is that on earth only those with a miracle or two will legitimately be called "Saint" on earth by the Church, even though Saint Paul uses that title for his fellow Christians. Note that everyone in purgatory will eventually make it to heaven, but who knows how long?

So, what is purgatory? Are we purged? Someone explained it this way. If you were invited to lunch with the Queen of England, you would have to be shown how to act in her presence with proper etiquette like bowing, and using the correct title, how to use a napkin, silverware and in what order, and so forth.

Who knows, since no one has come back to tell us. Jesus came back from the dead but note that our Creed states He descended into Hell and on the third day rose from the dead. It says nothing about Purgatory, a place of purification.

Generally, we do not like to think of death, let alone Purgatory. If nothing else gets our attention, at least death does and what comes after. We pray that God gives us a little more time to get our act together. Saint Augustine once prayed in his younger days, "Lord, make me holy, but not yet."

You see pictures from the Renaissance of saints sitting in their caves and cells with a skull grinning at them from a shelf or a tabletop. It was a good reminder of death, a reminder of what lay ahead and to prepare **now**. People also see scenes from the Last Judgement like the one in the Sistine Chapel where a few are going to heaven, some to hell and many still in Purgatory.

After attending many funerals, especially non-Catholic, one gets the impression from the service that Heaven is more like a retirement home with time for endless rounds of golf and socializing with people we never met but now have time on our hands to meet. However, we see many testimonies of people on the internet now who have come back from the dead and testify what it is like, good and bad.

The main reason why we celebrate All Souls Day is that we are reminded of the different possibilities in the afterlife, some which might not be very pleasant. I'll also put my trust in God's judgement and his unconditional love,

rather than some preachers who seems stuck on the Hell and Damnation sermons.

Maybe it is time to talk more about my Dad. He was a WWII veteran and was stationed in the Pacific Theater, mainly on Bougainville Island which was strategically ideal place to keep tabs on Japanese ship movement throughout the Pacific. Dad never spoke about his time in the war. Once in a while he would mention Bougainville but usually reflecting on the natives that helped them during the war with the Japanese. It wasn't until I was living at Governor's Island, about eight years ago that the whole story started to come out what he really did there. It was then that his papers were released along with personal and official diaries which had been collected at the end of the war and stamped with "Top Secret."

After I read those diaries, which I have now in my office, I realized what war for my Dad was really like, but one could never make a movie since it was too gruesome. And trust me, it was Hell on earth. It made Purgatory look like heaven. I realized that my Dad had PTSD big time, worse than the soldier who have returned from the wars in Afghanistan, Viet Nam, Korea, and all previous wars. Only this war in the Pacific was never talked about.

After I read the diaries, that was the first time in my life that I could finally forgive my Father for all the violence that we had to suffer as a family because of his PTSD. What a gift I had received, finally knowing the hell my Dad went through, never sharing it with us until he was in his late 70's and 80's. The men still living from his Regiment would hold a reunion every year and recount their war times, and slowly my Dad was able to begin healing spiritually and psychologically and talk about what the war was really like.

What is Purgatory? For me it will be a time when I can finally embrace my father and say, "OK, I understand, I forgive you, and I thank you for your service to our country, especially the time you paid with your suffering after the war all those years. I will always love you. Forgive me for not loving you unconditionally all those years.

So, brothers and sisters, let's quit pretending. Life is difficult, but the next life will hopefully make up for it, only if we learn to love even unconditionally. Then Purgatory will be a time to prepare us that we may more fully enjoy heaven when we have made amends with everyone we have meet in our lifetime and tying up lose ends.