

- One of the most spectacular tombs in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is that of Pope Alexander VII. Designed by the master architect and sculptor, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the tomb features death depicted as a golden skeleton holding a gilded hourglass.
- Located in a prominent spot in the south transept, it's hard to miss – and it generally evokes a strong reaction, especially upon seeing it for the first time – for this rather spooky tomb reminds us so pointedly that death is inescapable.
- The sands of life fall through the hourglass for us all, and each of us will have to face death eventually, and so we must give some thought to how we will prepare for it.
- This past week the Church celebrated two of Her most beautiful and important feast days: the Solemnity of All Saints and the Feast of All Souls.
- These twin feasts are beautiful in that they shine a light of faith on the fearsome phenomena of death, and they are important in that they remind us how important it is for us to be well prepared for that ultimate moment in life when we'll go to meet our Maker.
- What I love about these twin feast days is that they present us with ultimate realities and challenge us to live our faith with integrity in response to these ultimate realities.
- Yet the focus on death that's brought to bear by All Saints Day and All Souls Day is not at all macabre or maudlin. No, these feast days call us to look beyond the finitude of earthly existence to see what lies beyond that great veil separating us from eternity – sort of a preview of coming attractions!
- On All Saints Day, we see the glory of the new and heavenly Jerusalem, the home for which we've all been created. And through this feast we are reminded of what it is that we hope for in the depths of our souls: an eternal and loving union with our Triune Lord!
- All Saints Day reminds us of the reward that awaits those who run the race of life heroically: glorious sainthood!
- And on All Souls Day, we are reminded of our solemn duty to pray for those who have gone before us through that great veil separating us from eternity, so that they, too, might be purified of their sins and enjoy that new and heavenly Jerusalem.
- In short, these are not feasts for atheists or agnostics! Oh no, they are bold feasts that loudly proclaim our faith in God and in His justice and mercy.
- They are feasts that call us to look beyond this visible, earthly existence to see with the eyes of faith that invisible, eternal world that is much more real than the visible world around us.
- They are feasts that remind us that Catholicism is not just a faith or set of beliefs or even a way of life. It's also a distinct vision or perception of the world in which we live. Because this is so, we who are Catholic should approach death differently than other people.
- During the month of November, which is the month in which we commemorate our beloved dead, we are immersed in the topic of death in our liturgy.
- As we approach the end of the liturgical year, our readings at Mass are becoming more apocalyptic in nature and speak more of death, of the end times, and of the afterlife.
- The Church takes up this topic of death so intently because the day we die is the most important day of our lives. It's the day to which our entire lives should be directed because it's the day we see God face to face and our eternal fate is sealed.

- As Christians, whenever we speak of death, we automatically turn our minds toward the resurrection. In fact, our first reading and Gospel today both speak of death and the hope we have in the resurrection.
- And this hope must be the driving force of our life. Hope for our own personal resurrection, as well as for all of mankind, should permeate our entire being, and it should set the tone for how we live our lives.
- As the Gospel reminds us, our God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Therefore, as His children, we are called to live our lives in such a way that we can hope that we will live with God eternally.
- So, in speaking about death today, our readings teach us something about how we should live!
- While meditating upon death can engender some feelings of fear within us, our readings teach us that fear is not what our Lord desires for us. To the contrary, Jesus wants to fill us with confidence in Him. This is precisely the point of our second reading today.
- In writing to the Thessalonians, St. Paul reminds them of the love and encouragement of both Jesus and the Father, and prays that our Lord will encourage their hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word.
- Most importantly, St. Paul reminds us today that our Lord is faithful and that He is our strength and protection, guarding us from the evil one. It is He who gives us courage, love, and the ability to endure.
- So, while a fear of death and the possibility of hell is a very natural fear, as Christians we must bear in mind that our Lord always stands ready to help us in every situation.
- If we live our lives in communion with Him as His true children, if we train ourselves during this life to place all our confidence in Him – believing always in His deep fatherly love for us – then we have nothing to fear. His mercy is available to all who ask for it.
- Moreover, as Catholics we understand quite well that some things in life are worse than death, and that some things are worth dying for.
- What’s worse than death? Losing one’s salvation, and living without Christian integrity. What’s worth dying for? Our Faith, of course, and the honor and glory of God.
- Brothers and sisters, in this month of November Holy Mother Church calls us to meditate well on death, not with fear and trembling, but with trust in God’s mercy and hope for the glory that awaits those who love God well in this life.
- At the same time, we are also called to pray and make offerings those who have gone before us, offering up our prayers and penances for the purification for those in purgatory, that they may be cleansed of the temporal punishments due for their sins and pass on to Heaven.
- May we fulfill our duties toward all the dead with great love and affection, praying for them and offering up penances and sacrifices on their behalf, and let us trust that our charity toward the poor souls in Purgatory will help prepare us well to meet God face to face when we die.
- Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. Amen. May they rest peace, and may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen!