

- Both our first reading and Gospel today remind us of the importance of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Indeed, this is the first and greatest commandment.
- Why is this so important? For if God is all-knowing and all-powerful, if He is Love Itself, what need has God of our love?
- Well, the question is not one of need on God's part. God has no need of our love. In fact, He has no need of us, strictly speaking. Yet, in love God created us. And because loving Him in return is good for us, God desires that we love Him.
- Loving God is good for us because doing so is what prepares us for Heaven. You see, Heaven is a mutual and eternal union of love, and we cannot hope to even enter Heaven unless we love God and love Him well.
- It is for this reason that the Mystical Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross, stated that "In the evening of life, we will be judged by love alone."
- Much like the post-Resurrection encounter between Jesus and St. Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, when we go to our judgment at the end of our earthly lives, the primary question Jesus will ask us is this: Do you love me?
- And in that moment both awesome and fearful, we will know with absolute certainty the answer to that question. We will have full and complete knowledge about the quality of our love for God, and we will not be able to deny the defects.
- Of course, none of us – save Our Lady – have loved God perfectly and without defect. We all have sinned, and each sinful act we commit is a negation of one's love for God, an undermining of our love for God.
- Yet, if we did love our Lord zealously as evidenced by both our striving to do God's will and by our contrition for our sins, if we possess true purity of heart, then we shall enter into the joys of Heaven, happy to be counted amongst all the saints.
- But, if our love is defective such that we have failed to make sufficient reparation for our sins, it is then that we must face the fires of purgatory so that we might be purified sufficiently before entering eternal union with God.
- As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (cf. CCC 1030)
- God and sin are mutually exclusive; they cannot exist together. So, if we have any sin that isn't fully expiated by the time we die, that expiation takes place after death in Purgatory.
- While the Catholic imagination has often painted Purgatory as a punishment for sin – a sort of supernatural prison that we must pass through – Purgatory is actually more about purifying and preparing us for heaven rather than simply punishing us for our sins.
- The saints also have much to say about Purgatory that helps us understand it more fully, and to see the great goodness of Purgatory.
- St. Catherine of Genoa, who was given visions of Purgatory, said: "Souls in Purgatory unite great joy with great suffering. One does not diminish the other... and day-by-day this happiness grows as God flows in these souls, and more and more the hindrance to His entrance is consumed. The hindrance is the rust of sin and the fire burns the rust away so that more and more the soul opens itself to the divine inflowing."

- She goes on: “No peace is comparable to that of the souls in Purgatory except that of the saints in heaven. On the other hand, the souls in Purgatory endure torments which no tongue can describe and no intelligence comprehend, without special revelation.”
- Yet, Purgatory is not some horror chamber. It’s a process by which our self-centeredness and pride are subdued, the defects caused by our sins are corrected, and our debts to justice are paid in full. And all who undergo Purgatory will eventually be saved.
- Thus, there is both joy and sorrow in Purgatory. As St. Francis de Sales put it: “Just as the pains of Purgatory are severe, so the interior satisfaction and bliss enjoyed by the souls there must surpass anything we can imagine. How wonderful it must be for them when they feel themselves gradually being spiritually healed, gradually being freed from their remaining moral debt to God, and gradually drawing nearer and nearer to the joyful vision of the Blessed Trinity!”
- Those undergoing Purgatory know the state of their soul and the mercy God has had on them. They understand to a great degree God’s infinite holiness and their own unworthiness to behold Him face to face.
- For this reason, the souls undergoing Purgatory willingly bear the pains of the process, as they know these sufferings purify and prepare them for Heaven. Indeed, they would rather not go to Heaven than to appear before God without being fully purified.
- St. Faustina, who was known to communicate with the holy souls in Purgatory, recounted a story about one such episode that teaches us something so very important.
- She said: “before All Souls’ Day, I went to the cemetery at dusk. Although it was locked, I managed to open the gate a bit said, ‘If you need something, my dear little souls, I will be glad to help you to the extent that the rule permits me.’ I then heard these words, ‘Do the will of God; we are happy in the measure that we have fulfilled God’s will.’”
- In other words, if we want to be happy in eternity, earnestly striving to do God’s will is crucial. Doing God’s will is how we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- In fact, St. John teaches us in his first epistle that loving God necessarily means obeying Him. So, we must make it a point to seek out the will of God for our lives and to follow His will no matter what the cost.
- It’s only when we do this that we can say that we truly love God as we should and thereby fulfill the first and greatest commandment.
- The Gospel also reminds us that we must also love our neighbors as we love ourselves. As Catholics we know that this includes not only the people with whom we meet and interact in our daily lives, but also the poor souls in Purgatory.
- This is precisely why Holy Mother Church dedicates the month of November to praying for the holy souls; it’s why the Church permits us to gain indulgences by visiting a cemetery and praying for the dead during the first 8 days of November.
- It’s why we ask to list your deceased loved ones on your All Souls envelopes and why we offer a Novena of Masses for them this month; its why we pray the Litany for the Dead after our daily Masses through this month.
- So, let’s all commit to loving God more fervently: with all our mind, heart, soul, and strength, so that we can be ready to enter Heaven when we die. And let us love our neighbors as ourselves, most especially the poor souls, by praying for them.
- All you saints in Heaven, pray for us!