Father O'Connor's Homily for 2 November 2025
Feast of All Souls

Wisdom 3: 1-9
Romans 6: 3-9
John 6: 37-40

When we celebrate a Funeral Mass, white is the vestment color that we most often see. It is a reminder of the resurrection of Jesus. But there are two additional vestment color options for Masses for the Dead: violet and black. They are reminders of the seriousness of death.

On this All Souls' Day, I thought that I would reach into the rich storehouse of the Church's tradition and wear black today. For the older of us, you remember from years ago that black was always used for Requiem Masses, the Masses for the Dead.

By God's grace and favor, we belong to God's family, the Church. And the Church has three divisions: the Church in heaven, the Church on earth and the Church in purgatory.

All the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass acknowledge this. [The Eucharistic Prayer begins with the" Preface/Holy, Holy, Holy" and concludes with the "Through Him, with Him and in Him/Amen" right before the Our Father.] In each one of them, we ask for the prayers of all the angels and saints in heaven, we pray for one another here on earth, and we pray for our faithful departed in purgatory.

On November 1st the Church on earth celebrated the Feast of All of the Saints in heaven. On November 2nd, the Feast of All Souls, the Church on earth prays for those in purgatory. And we continue to remember the faithful departed throughout this month of November.

It is that time of the year in our hemisphere for raking leaves and getting our gardens in order because winter is almost here. And fall also reminds us that we need to be spiritually "tidying up" as well – repenting of our sins and making amends for what we have done wrong.

This Feast of All Souls assures us that if we die in God's friendship, but haven't quite finished spiritually "tidying up" in this life, God, in His mercy, gives us a second opportunity in the next life – which we call "purgatory."

Why do we pray for people who have died? We would never pray for someone who is already in heaven – like our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph and all the canonized saints. But we do pray for our beloved dead so that if they are not already in heaven, they soon will be.

The doctrine of purgatory is referred to in Scripture, in our Tradition [with a capital "T"], in the teachings of Church Councils throughout the history of the Church, and we find evidence of it in our own prayer. As Catholics we pray for our faithful departed, don't we? That is why we are here today for this All Souls' Day Mass. And we have been praying for the dead from the very beginnings of the Christian community.

The doctrine of purgatory is really another testimony of God's love and mercy. The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** says: "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" [#1030].

It is important to remember that purgatory is not the same thing as hell. Hell is a final destination: it is eternal separation from God with no hope of ever re-gaining that relationship.

Purgatory is a stop-on-the way to the final destination of heaven. Everyone in purgatory is saved and will absolutely go to heaven. But they are not quite ready yet.

In the Act of Contrition, we promise "to amend our lives" and "to make up for our sins." Maybe we don't get around to doing penance for our sins as fully as we might in this life. Maybe there are some venial sins that we are just not ready to give up. And yet we die in God's friendship. Purgatory is God giving us a second chance in eternity to make those amends and to be purified so that we can enter heaven properly attired in holiness.

I will give you an example of something that happened to me that reminds me of purgatory.

I was invited to a Christmas party that I thought was a casual event. So I arrived in a pullover sweater and khaki pants. When the hostess opened the door of her home, I saw that she was dressed in a long, black gown and that all the other guests were in formal attire. I was embarrassed to death!

I wanted to go home and change, but she would not hear of it. Even though all the other guests treated me kindly, I spent that entire evening totally aware of how under-dressed and out-of-place I was for the occasion. I could not wait to get home.

I have thought that this is a glimpse of why God has given us the gift of purgatory if, at the end of my life on earth, I arrive with amends still needed to be made – so that I can be properly dressed in holiness for the kingdom of heaven.

We remember our faithful departed on this Feast of All Souls. They can pray for us, but they cannot pray for themselves. We pray for them confidently for the Lord loves them and the Lord loves us who miss them and still mourn for them. And we will be re-united one day!

And in that spirit, I ask you to join me in the age-old prayer for them: Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

And may we take comfort in believing this. Amen.