

From Death into Life

The Catholic Review

How providential that the Church gives us November to honor the souls of the dead—and for two reasons. First, to commend our loved ones to the mercy of God, thanking the Lord for the lives we've shared with them and commending them to God for their good works while they were among us.

Two weeks ago, many of the priests and bishops of the Archdiocese, gathered in the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen's crypt chapel to pray for all those bishops and priests of Baltimore who have crossed from this life to the next, and in particular those who have died these last twelve months. Each has passed into that world beyond, quite probably not fully ready to stand face to face with the Risen and Transfigured Christ. Hence purgatory and their need for our prayers.

The moving Mass that we celebrated in the crypt that day was the first formal ceremony there since we laid to rest our beloved Archbishop Emeritus, Archbishop Borders, in April of this year. The Archbishop would have celebrated his 97th birthday on October 9. Never without a smile, the Archbishop lived a truly joyful priestly and episcopal ministry and inspired countless others toward the priesthood—having witnessed this man who found such happiness in serving the Lord and others.

His priestly example lives on today through his many writings and through the memories we all share of him. Much the same can be said of the other beloved priests of this venerable Archdiocese who died this past year. With the passage of time, we might tend to forget their saintly ministry; therefore, the Church's special emphasis each November encourages us to pause and pray that the pure hearts and meritorious deeds that marked their priestly lives might shine forth without shadow or blemish as they reflect the Lord's heavenly, awesome radiance. Over the past year, we lost the following priests: Fathers Edward Bayer, George Buettner, John Fullen, Edward Huesman, Thomas Polk, Gerald West and Msgr. Dennis Tinder. We also remember two religious order priests, among so many others who have served so generously in our Archdiocese, died this past year: Fathers Paul Murphy, C.M.

and Theodore Heyburn, C.Ss.R.

The second reason the Church gives us this month of the Holy Souls is to invite, to make each of us ready for that final day, whenever it might come. The early fathers of the Church offer us any number of reflections to help us prepare for that day of judgment.

Listen to St. Ambrose: Keep facing death with perseverance. The word 'death' must not trouble us; the blessings that come from a safe journey home should bring us joy.

And St. Cyprian: What an honor, what happiness to depart joyfully from this world, to go forth in glory from the anguish and pain, in one moment to close the eyes that looked on the world of men, and in the next to open at once to look at God and Christ.

Again, Cyprian: How unreasonable it is to pray that God's will be done, and then not promptly to obey it when he calls us from this world! Instead, we struggle and resist like self-willed slaves and are brought into the Lord's presence with sorrow and lamentation, not freely consenting to our departure, but constrained by necessity... Why then, do we pray for the kingdom of heaven to come if this earthly bondage pleases us so?

I recall the deep impression made on me during my visits with Archbishop Borders during the last months of his life. He spoke with genuine sincerity and serenity of the next, eternal phase of his life and I even got the impression he was looking forward to the venture! How many times had the graces he prayed for did come his way, as he prayed, Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death! And his prayers were answered.

May ours be answered as well.