The month of November is Dedicated To the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

The Church commemorates all her faithful children who have departed from this life but have not yet attained the joys of heaven. St. Paul warns us that we must not be ignorant concerning the dead, nor sorrowful, "even as others who have no hope ... For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven ... and the dead who are in Christ shall rise. The offering of Masses for the repose of the soul of the faithful departed is linked with our belief in Purgatory.

We believe that if a person has died fundamentally believing in God but with venial sins and the hurt caused by sin, then God in His divine love and mercy will first purify the soul. After this purification has been completed, the soul will have the holiness and purity needed to share in the beatific vision in heaven. The Vatican Council II affirmed, "This sacred council accepts loyally the venerable faith of our ancestors in the living communion which exists between us and our brothers who are in the glory of heaven or who are yet being purified after their death…" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, #51). In 1902, Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Mirae caritatis* beautifully elaborated this point and emphasized the connection between the communion of saints with the Mass: "The grace of mutual love among the living, strengthened and increased by the Sacrament of the Eucharist, flows, especially by virtue of the Sacrifice [of the Mass], to all who belong to the communion of saints.

Think of this point: The Holy Mass transcends time and space, uniting the faithful in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory into a Holy Communion, and the Holy Eucharist Itself augments our union with Christ, wipes away venial sins, and preserves us from future mortal sins (cf. *Catechism*, #1391-1396). Therefore, the offering of the Mass and other prayers or sacrifices for the intentions of the faithful departed are good and holy acts.

This practice is not new. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts, "From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic Sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God" (#1032). Actually, this "beginning" has roots even in the Old Testament. Judas Maccabees offered prayers and sacrifices for the Jewish soldiers who had died wearing pagan amulets, which were forbidden by the Law; II Maccabees reads, "Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out" (12:43) and "Thus, [Judas Maccabees] made atonement for the dead that ty might be freed from sin" (12:46).

St. Padre Pio. Says, "The holy souls are eager for the prayers of the faithful which can gain indulgences for them. Their intercession is powerful. Pray unceasingly. We must empty Purgatory!"

