



Novena to the Saints in Heaven for the saints on earth
by Deacon Keith Fournier





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Novena to the Saints in Heaven for the saints on earth

The Lord Be with You, I'm Deacon Keith Fournier, the Editor in Chief of Catholic Online.

Through this Novena to Novena Prayer to the Saints in Heaven for the saints on earth we ask for the intercession of all those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith, as the Priest prays at Holy Mass; the Divine Liturgy. They are members of the Church, the Body of Christ, and so are we.

We are joined with them, in Jesus, and we are joined with one another, in Jesus, Together, for the sake of the world which God still Loves so much that He sends His Son. As members of the Body of Jesus Christ, that mission now continues through us. We are the Body of Jesus Christ.

The Saints in Heaven are examples to be imitated. They are powerful intercessors, who pray for us from their place in the Communion of Love in heaven. With the help of their intercession, we ask the Father to raise up Saints for our own age and to give us the graces we need to continue to grow into the Image and Likeness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, so that we can grow in holiness of life and lead all men, women and children back to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.



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DAY ONE REFLECTION

All Christians are called to be saints and to live in the Communion of Saints, beginning now and opening, into all eternity.

First, let us consider the word saint. It means holy ones.

We are all "saints" in the sense of having been set aside for the Lord to live holy lives and called into communion with Him, and through Him, with one another for the sake of the world.

(See Catholic Catechism, # 946 - 952)

Through our Baptism, we have been incorporated into Jesus Christ, becoming members of His Body, the Church. We now live in the Church, because we live in Christ and He lives in us.

However, there are some Christians among us who excel in love.

From the earliest centuries of the Church, those Christians who lived lives of extraordinarily intimate communion with the Lord and demonstrated heroic virtue; those who reflected the radiance of Christ were honored, both during life, and after they entered into eternal communion with the Lord. They were given a place of honor within the "communion of Saints."

This is the fertile field from which the practice of canonizing some of those members of the Body of Christ began. The Catholic Catechism explains:

"By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the Saints to them as models and intercessors.

"The Saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history." Indeed, "holiness is the hidden source and infallible measure of her apostolic activity and missionary zeal." (CCC #828)

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DAY TWO REFLECTION

We are still joined in Jesus Christ with all who have gone before us because, in the words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome, nothing can separate us from the love of God made fully present in Jesus Christ, including death. (*Romans 8:38,39*).

The Saints are a part of the eternal family to which we are now joined in and through Jesus Christ. They are part of that great cloud of witnesses which the author of the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews makes reference in these inspired words of encouragement:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."
(*Hebrews 12:1-2*)

Jesus never promised easy. He did promise to be with us always.

We are members of the family of Jesus. Our brothers and sisters are praying for us, offering both their example and their intercession.

One of my favorite readings in the Liturgy of the Hours is from a homily given by an Abbott and Doctor of the Church named Bernard of Clairvaux on this Feast entitled Let us make haste to our brethren who are awaiting us. Here is a portion:

'Why should our praise and glorification, or even the celebration of this feast day, mean anything to the Saints? What do they care about earthly honors when their heavenly Father honors them by fulfilling the faithful promise of the Son?



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DAY TWO REFLECTION

What does our commendation mean to them? The Saints have no need of honor from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them. But I tell you, when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a tremendous yearning.

Calling the Saints to mind inspires, or rather arouses in us, above all else, a longing to enjoy their company, so desirable in itself. We long to share in the citizenship of heaven, to dwell with the spirits of the blessed, to join the assembly of patriarchs, the ranks of the prophets, the council of apostles, the great host of martyrs, the noble company of confessors and the choir of virgins. In short, we long to be united in happiness with all the Saints.

But our dispositions change. The Church of all the first followers of Christ awaits us, but we do nothing about it. The Saints want us to be with them, and we are indifferent. The souls of the just await us, and we ignore them.

Come, brothers, let us at length spur ourselves on. We must rise again with Christ, we must seek the world which is above and set our mind on the things of heaven. Let us long for those who are longing for us, hasten to those who are waiting for us, and ask those who look for our coming to intercede for us.

We should not only want to be with the Saints, we should also hope to possess their happiness. While we desire to be in their company, we must also earnestly seek to share in their glory. Do not imagine that there is anything harmful in such an ambition as this; there is no danger in setting our hearts on such glory.'

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DAY THREE REFLECTION

In its treatment of the ancient creed's profession of the "communion of Saints" the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

"After confessing "the holy catholic Church," the Apostles' Creed adds "the communion of Saints." In a certain sense this article is a further explanation of "What is the Church if not the assembly of all the Saints?"

The communion of Saints is the Church.

AND WE ARE MEMBERS OF THAT COMMUNION CALLED THE CHURCH

In the Second Century, St Cyprian wrote:

Whoever has God for His Father, has the Church for His Mother

And the great Bishop of Hippo, Augustine, always spoke of the **WHOLE CHRIST**, Head and Body, as joined and inseparable.

In other words, we are joined together, **NOW**, with all who have gone before us, as we pray in the Liturgy, marked with the sign of Faith.

And the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

"Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others... We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since he is the head...Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments."

"As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund."

The term "communion of saints" therefore has two closely linked meanings: Communion in holy things (*sancta*)" and "among holy persons (*sancti*)." (CCC # 946-948a)

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DAY FOUR REFLECTION

In Matthews Gospel, we read these challenging words of Jesus:

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust."

"For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (St. Matthew 5: 43-48)

How can we be 'Perfect?' What does it mean? What does holiness mean? Can we all become holy?

The admonition from Jesus is clear and undeniable. It is repeated in other Gospel accounts and developed in several New Testament Epistles.

Our problem with understanding and responding to the passage is twofold; we misunderstand the meaning of the word and we have a limited our comprehension of the goal of the fullness of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Greek word often translated in the New Testament as perfect is telios. Telios refers to something being completed, brought to its full purpose, potential and intended end and vocation.

For example, in the world of objects, a hammer is telios or perfect when it is hammering a nail. In the world of subjects, things are telios or perfect when they are fulfilling their nature.

The One through whom we were first created, is re-creating us now through His grace - as cooperate and choose to live our lives now in Him. Yet, we do not yet perceive who we are to become.



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DAY FOUR REFLECTION

The beloved disciple John explained in his first letter, "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. " (1 John 3:2)

We are called even now to become like Him. We are called to be "perfected" or completed in Jesus Christ.

We are called to holiness, to sanctity,

We are called to become saints.

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DAY FIVE REFLECTION

The Holy Spirit intends to make us all Saints.

We are meant to progress in the Christian life. To grow in faith. To continue to be converted. We are called to a new way of life, a lifestyle, of ongoing conversion.

That does not happen by our own strength of will. To the contrary, it happens as we empty ourselves of ourselves, in order to be filled with His Divine Life. The Apostle Paul understood his own inadequacies.

He called himself the chief among sinners (*1 Tim. 1:15*)

"The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners."

He called himself the foremost because he believed that he was. He did not have a bad self-image. He understood the path to holiness and knew the gift of grace.

He also opens for us a key to unlocking the mystery in his letter to the Galatians. He writes:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
(*Galatians 2:20*)

We follow the same Risen Jesus and are invited to embrace the same way of life. I conclude with an excerpt from an explanation of Christian holiness in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

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"All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. "All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."



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DAY FIVE REFLECTION

In order to reach this perfection, the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus, the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.

All Saints of God, Pray for us



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DAY SIX REFLECTION

In the Gospel of Luke, we read:

"The mother of Jesus and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you." He said to them in reply, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it."
(Luke 8:19-21)

The encounter is also found in the account offered to us by St Matthew.

As one who teaches and preaches in the Catholic Church and the broader Christian community, I am often asked about whether Jesus had brothers and sisters. If by that question is meant natural or blood relatives, the text and the unbroken Christian tradition make the answer clear, No.

But the passage has a much deeper meaning.

Failure to consider the original language of the text has led to a mistaken notion of the possibility of Jesus having brothers in his natural family. The reality is that the word used for extended family, a vital part of the Jewish understanding of family, is not accurately translated.

Sadly, since the unfortunate ruptures in the Church since the Protestant Reformation (and there is plenty of blame to go around), this particular misinterpretation has been amplified and used in polemics. Such an exercise not only adds to the unfortunate divisions among Christians, it misses the meaning and beauty of the passage.

Unfortunately, some have also argued that these passages stand for the proposition that Jesus was making a comment intended to lessen the importance of his earthly mother. This "mother is unimportant" interpretation is textually inaccurate and theologically mistaken.



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DAY SIX REFLECTION

It runs contrary to the biblical context of the encounter and rejects the consistent, unbroken Christian tradition concerning its profound meaning. Such a misreading ascribes a minimalist role to Mary in the Christian revelation and consequently in the life of every Christian.

It can cause us to miss a profound truth concerning the Christian life and vocation - as well as the meaning of the Church. It can discourage us from digging deeper into the text and grasping a profoundly important insight. This insight has great implications and can lead us to a deeper experience of the Christian life and vocation.

I stand with the ancient Christian tradition, rooted in what is called the Patristic literature (writings of the early Church fathers). The opposite of this "mother is less important" claim is what is being revealed through these words - and in this encounter.

Understood in this light, this passage reveals a framework for an authentically human and relational spirituality, a spirituality of communion. We are made members of the very family of God through Jesus Christ and His Saving Incarnation. We are his mothers, brothers and sisters, as we live His Word and walk in His Way.

Through our Baptism, we are all invited into the very family of God. When we choose to be obedient to the will and the Word of God; we enter into an eternal relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We actually become a part of the "family" of God; we become "mother" sister" and "brother" to the Lord.

We enter into "communion" with the Trinitarian God, through Him.
We enter into the Communion of His Saints.

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DAY SEVEN REFLECTION

"Behold your mother; behold your son".

In His final act of Self-giving Love, revealed for all eternity on Golgotha's Hill, Jesus spoke those words and expanded the importance of the expression mother and brothers. We read about this encounter in the Gospel of St. John.

Picture the poignant scene, right before He was to breathe His last breath:

"Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home." (*John 19:26-27*).

From antiquity, the Fathers of the Church taught that this encounter was also about more than the relationship between the Apostle John (*whom sacred scripture calls "the beloved disciple"*) and Mary the mother of the Lord.

It was -and is- about the expanded family of the Church, the community that Jesus came to found - and of which He is the Head \bar{n} and we are the members.

As a final gift, right before He died, He gave His mother to His whole family, through giving her to the beloved disciple John. This was a gift for all of us, an exchange, an expansion of His family.

In this exchange, the Christian tradition has long taught, He also entrusted all of us to her maternal care.

Jesus was not minimizing His relationship with His mother through these words given in response to the crowd, He was expanding it.



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DAY SEVEN REFLECTION

Jesus hungers, through Divine love, to include all of us in the family circle of God. In doing so, He invites us on the journey home to the Father's house in Him, through Him, and with Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this exchange, Jesus opens for those with eyes to see and ears to hear the deeper interior importance and meaning of the motherhood of Mary and the interior meaning of all family relationships renewed by the Holy Spirit.

He gives to those with ears to hear and eyes to see, a key insight - family relationships touch upon, model and make present an eternal mystery into which each of us who are baptized are invited!

The Church truly is a family, God's family. Understanding this insight, and living it, is a key to the spiritual life. The Christian vocation and mission is fundamentally about relationship and communion.

All who are incorporated into the Body of Jesus Christ through Baptism begin even now to experience the intimacy, (*expressed in family relationships*), that is the essence of the very life of the Trinity.

Through His life, death and Resurrection (*the "Paschal mystery"*), He opens a way for every man, woman and child, who chooses to do the will of His Father, to enter into the family circle of God through living our lives in Him.

The Father of Jesus becomes our Father also, as we enter, through Him, into the inner life of the Trinity. He underscores this truth right before He ascended when He instructed Mary of Magdala to tell the disciples "I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (*John 20:17*).

Understanding this mystery requires prayer and revelation. Our eyes must be opened to its fullness and our hearts must be changed by the encounter. That requires living faith. We are members of the very Family of God.

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DAY EIGHT REFLECTION

The older I get the more I love the Feast of All Saints. It is our family Feast Day. Those who have gone on before us cheer us on. They are our models, our allies, and our intercessors. They are also a great source of hope.

They lived very human lives, just like we do. However, they learned to live them faithfully in the Lord. How did they do this? By yielding to His grace every day. By learning to give their yes to Him. By growing in their relationship with Him.

That engaged their capacity to make choices, their human freedom. Now, they are in the fullness of joy, in the communion of the Trinity, experiencing the fulfillment of all for which they longed. Now they are truly free.

That is where we are headed - and our experience of that joy can begin now.

This is a day for rejoicing, decision and anticipation. This is our Feast.

The words pronounced by priests throughout the world on this Feast should become our song today.

Let us all rejoice in the Lord, as we celebrate the feast day in honor of all the Saints, at whose festival the Angels rejoice and praise the Son of God.

Our Bible readings call us to holiness of life, to sanctity.

As we reflect on the great heroes of the faith, we are meant to walk along the same Way they did and allow the same Lord to re-create us anew.



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DAY EIGHT REFLECTION

We can make progress along that path by embracing the stuff of our everyday life, just as they did, and joining it to the Lord. Our joys, our sorrows, our struggles and, yes, even our failures, joined to His Cross, become the stuff out of which sanctity is forged, as if by fire.

We are all called to be saints. We should all long to be Saints.

Sanctity is not reserved for a few; it is the vocation of all who bear the name Christian.

Grace makes it possible.

Not easy, but possible.

ALL SAINTS of God, pray for Us



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DAY NINE REFLECTION

The early Christians honored the dead. They had a special devotion to and affection for the martyrs.

We have accounts like the Martyrdom of Polycarp from the middle of the second century which set forth the practice:

Accordingly, we afterwards took up his bones, more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more pure than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, so that when being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.

The Liturgy was celebrated over the bones of the holy ones, the Saints, who gave their lives for Love Himself; Jesus Christ the Savior.

This is the origin of our practice of embedding relics in the altars of our Churches.

Christians do not fear death. Christians view death with the eyes of faith as a change of habitation and not a source of fear.

The dates of commemorating those who witnessed to the faith by their heroic lives and deaths varied as local communities honored local saints and martyrs. Over time, those Feast days became more universally accepted as the rhythm of the Church Year became more uniform.

The first account we have of honoring all the Saints is in the homilies of St Ephrem the Syrian (d. AD 373).

The Bishop of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom (d. AD 407), set aside the first Sunday after Pentecost for this commemoration. The Church of the East still celebrates the Feast on that day.

In the Western Church the date may have been on that date but was moved to May 13th.



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DAY NINE REFLECTION

There is some evidence that the move to November 1 came with Pope Gregory III (*d. AD 741*), and was likely first observed on November 1st in Germany.

The Feast of All Saints is our Feast Day.

In a special way, we commemorate those honored by canonization, the process wherein the Church has acknowledged their sacrificial lives of holiness and holds them up as models and effective intercessors.

However, this celebration is grounded in the ancient Church teaching concerning the Communion of all the Saints.

Just as we pray for one another, those who have gone on before us pray for us.

They are joined to us forever in the communion of love and their prayer is powerful. This ancient and firm belief is attested to in the earliest writings of the Christian tradition.

For example, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (*AD 350*) wrote:

“We mention those who have fallen asleep: first the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition...” (*Catechetical Lecture 23:9*).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this communion:

Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness...They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us...So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped....as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself:



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DAY NINE REFLECTION

We worship Christ as God's Son; we love the martyrs as the Lord's disciples and imitators, and rightly so because of their matchless devotion towards their king and master. May we also be their companions and fellow disciples (CCC # 956, 957)

ALL Saints of God, Pray for Us





Novena to the Saints in Heaven for the saints on earth

Beloved Father, through the life, death and resurrection of your only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, we have become your adopted sons and daughters.

Through Baptism we are now members of His Body, the Church, which is Your family.

Our Savior Jesus taught us that whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother. We thank you that promise includes each one of us.

As members of the family of Jesus we are now reunited to you, in Him. Through Baptism we have become adopted sons and daughters in your Beloved Son.

We now turn to you in prayer, through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit as OUR FATHER, ABBA.

We pray that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would raise up in our midst holy men, women and children, in every Nation, culture and walk of life.

Men, women and children who are so conformed to your Son Jesus that they make Him known by their words, deeds and life of love and sacrificial service.

Men, women and children who are saints for this urgent hour.

Men, Women and children who manifest the power of heaven on earth. Who continue the ministry of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, through signs of the kingdom to come.

May these holy men and women multiply - providing leaders and servants for a New Missionary Age of the Church.

And, we pray for ourselves and our families, that we could grow closer and closer to you, every day, that we would be transformed by your grace and our free cooperation with your grace - Empowered by your Holy Spirit to become new creations in Jesus Christ.

Amen

