

HOMILY

The Fourteenth Annual Polka Mass

Saturday, November 1, 2008

4:30 P.M.

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed All Souls Day

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

*Niech będzie pochwalony Jesus Chrystus,
y na wieki wiekow. Amen*

(Praised be Jesus Christ, both now and forever. Amen)

It gives me great joy to welcome each and every one of you to our Annual Polka Mass. Thanks be to God, this is our fourteenth annual gathering. Our Polka Mass and Polish Night has become quite a tradition—the first Saturday in the month of November. With the changing of the leaves and the harvesting of the crops, it's kind of like a harvest festival. The cabbages and the potatoes that will be served at our Polish dinner, and afterwards, have come directly from the Michigan fields to our table. Not only are our taste buds watering for the home cooked foods, our celebration is brightened by the many festive costumes. Would those of you in costume, please stand.

Our annual gathering, with the festive costumes, the polka music, the spirit, our gathering is like a Polish wedding. All we need is the bride and groom. Well, tonight we have two who are celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary: Ron and Marlene Bukowski. Congratulations! God has blessed them with seven children, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Although today is actually November 1, All Saints Day, as the sun sets the Church anticipates Sunday, November 2, and the annual Commemoration of All Souls. In fact, November is set aside as the month to remember.

Our Catholic catechism tells us this:

“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.”

Purgatory is the name we give to that process by which a person, after death, is prepared for eternal happiness. This process involves some kind of purification through which they are able to deeply realize how much God loves them. And at the same time, they come to see how much they have failed to love God and others. How this takes place, we simply do not know. The souls in purgatory are spirits without bodies, so any suffering is a spiritual one, not physical torment. Since they are on their last journey back to the Father, they are filled with great hope and joy, for the soul in purgatory is already saved. They are simply being prepared—made pure—for heaven.

It should come as no surprise to us that after we die most of us will need to go through some kind of purification or change so that we will become who God means us to be. Yes, even the best of us, even the saints, leave this life with at least a little bit of unfinished business and a bit of left over baggage. And that’s why we are encouraged to pray for the dead.

Ten years ago, Pope John Paul II issued a message simply entitled *I Urge Catholics to Pray for the Dead*. He pointed out how all followers of Christ are united. “*While waiting for death to be overcome once and for all, ‘some of the disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory,’ contemplating the Trinity in full light.*” Thus, when as Catholics we pray for the dead, our prayers are not aimed at changing God’s mind about our departed friends. God’s mind doesn’t need changing, his love for us is unchanging, and he’s always ready and waiting to welcome home even the worst of us.

Our prayers are for the deceased themselves that they will let the Lord help them let go of what remains of their old baggage and help them finish what is unfinished in them. So let us hold in prayer all the deceased whom you love. At the same time, we need to look to our hearts.

In the back of our minds, we know that our time on earth is limited. But the tendency is ever with us to ignore that reality. Like Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, we say to ourselves there is always tomorrow. But that is an illusion. For every one of us, there is only today.

There are things that we can begin to do today within ourselves.

- ✦ **The words of appreciation that we would speak need to be spoken today.**
- ✦ **The compassion that we feel needs to be shown today.**
- ✦ **The grudges that we have been harboring need to be let go today.**
- ✦ **The letter that needs to be written needs to be written and sent today.**

I have been with many people in their dying hours. I have heard them express all kinds of regrets. I have never heard them say, "I wish I had spent more time in the office, or I wish I would've made more money, or I wish I would've played more golf." If the departed ones we remember today could speak, they would tell us:

"Love your very most today as if this were your first day, your only day, your last day. For tomorrow's world depends on how we love today."

Ja cie Kocham.

(God bless you.)

