

ALL SOULS NOVENA

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FIRST DAY

Sin is the one thing that holds back the progress of men and women. True progress is man's ascent to God. Only sin blocks his path. Vice and crime throw human beings back to animal levels when they should be mounting toward the angels. Death in mortal sin means the complete failure that is hell. It flings a man, who is destined for eternal happiness, into eternal loss and pain. Death in venial sin or with the punishment due to sin still on the soul means a halt in the progress toward heaven. The poor soul—poor indeed in his eagerness to reach God and the tedious, painful delay that keeps him from God—must linger in God's prison-house. This is the sad land of purgatory. It is a place of anxious, almost impatient waiting. Since there are in purgatory relatives we loved and friends we knew and thousands of others who call to us for help, we pause and say:

The Prayer for the Holy Souls

O God, the creator and redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of thy servants and handmaids departed, the remission of all their sins; that through pious supplications they may obtain the pardon they have always desired. Who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end. Amen.

Church Triumphant, saints in heaven.

Church Suffering, souls in purgatory.

Church Militant, souls here on earth.

SECOND DAY:

Nothing else is humanly harder to bear than painful waiting. All the souls in purgatory are sure one day to reach heaven. They know how wonderful heaven is and how desirable is God. But they cannot follow the violent impulse that drives them toward their happiness. They must hunger for God and still be withheld from the possession of Him. In hell, there is only bleak and hopeless despair. In purgatory, there is hope and certainty and love and eagerness—and long periods of waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting... There is suffering too in purgatory, the suffering that washes away in flame the stains of guilt and cleanses as with fire the soul that will eventually enter into the presence of the spotless God. But the real pain of purgatory is that awful eagerness for God who is just out of reach, and that longing to go home to heaven, which is almost seen but as yet unattainable. Nothing defiled can enter heaven; that we know. So purgatory is the place where defilement is removed, where the souls that are destined for glory are prepared by punishment and tedious delay for their glorious home-coming with God. For the love we bear our friends in purgatory we pray:

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Church Militant, souls fighting the good fight here on earth.

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THIRD DAY:

This life on earth is, as we have heard a thousand times, a time of merit. When through the Church's indulgences we avail ourselves of the merits of Christ and of the saints, we can wipe away the guilt of forgiven sins and eliminate the punishment due to venial sins, as we can also do through penance and deeds of charity. But once the soul enters purgatory, the time for that soul to gain merit is ended. When we suffer on earth, we can offer our suffering to God, increasing thereby our future happiness in heaven and canceling out the pains of purgatory. When a soul suffers in purgatory, he slowly and tediously cancels the debts of sins; he gains no further merit for heaven. Nor are there indulgences in purgatory, nor fresh use of the merits of Christ, of His Mother, and of the saints. Thanks however to our union in the Mystical Body of Christ, thanks to the communion of the saints, we can gain merit for the suffering souls. We can win indulgences and apply them to the period of waiting of these souls. We can cut their sufferings and speed their entry into heaven by whatever of good that we offer for them on earth. In all generosity, we say for these souls who depend upon us.

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FOURTH DAY:

Swiftly the memory even of the dear dead seems to pass from human minds. Memory is like the tears upon a coffin, swiftly evaporated, quickly dried. The rush of the days fills the minds and hands of the living. The press of old associations and the establishment of new friends helps supplant and elbow into dusty corners of our minds the friends now hidden in God's penitentiary. But these prisoners do not forget us. In the slow, painful dragging of the days they have time to remember. They are so hungry for God that they have little heart for new companions. They are made sensitive—as pain always makes us sensitive—to memory, to neglect, to hope for deliverance, to the knowledge that those who once cried aloud their love have so swiftly forgotten. With gratitude, do they think of those who do remember them. With sadness, they think of those who have so swiftly dropped them. They pray to God, who loves them even in their exile, for the thoughtful and the mindful. They beg that those who have pushed them away for the near and the living will drop into their prison house a thought, a prayer, a good deed in ransom. Remembering our own dear dead, we pray for them:

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FIFTH DAY:

These in purgatory are the friends of God. These are the souls who will in a short time be glorious and powerful saints in heaven. Their souls are saved. Their crowns are awaiting them. Their thrones are prepared, and their mansions are ready. God loves them deeply, as He loves all those faithful sons and daughters who fought the good fight. Their prayers for others come straight to His throne. They can no longer pray for themselves; their time to merit is over. They can pray and they do pray for those on earth whom they love. That loving mother in purgatory is interceding for her children That devoted father is now more devoted Those friends have not forgotten the value of their friendship Those relatives are bound to us with ties much closer than blood. Most of all the holy souls pray for their benefactors. Our slight remembering of them wins for us a great measure of intercession from them. We pray thoughtlessly; they pray with the intensity of souls who are coming ever closer to God. We ask for deliverance for them; they beg God for a thousand blessings for us. In sheer wisdom and to our own advantage we say:

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SIXTH DAY:

Our souls hunger for God with far more intensity than ever a starving body hungers for food. Here in this world we are distracted by the pressure of the life about us. In purgatory there are no distractions. Their eyes fixed on the closed gates of heaven, the holy souls long for God, yearn for God, hunger and thirst for God. The terms of their sentence ring in their ears: "Thus and thus long shall you remain separated from your joy, until these sins and these misdeeds and these blemishes and these stains have been atoned for." Balanced against their consuming hunger for God is their certainty that they would not dare enter His presence with the slightest stain upon them. They almost wish that the fires burned more fiercely and more rapidly so that the pain could be at once more intense and more cleansing. Imagine then their gratitude for every prayer or good deed by which we help them cleanse their souls and speed them on their way to God. Imagine the leaping joy with which they welcome any act by which we cut their sentence, shorten their stay in purgatory, and hasten their entrance into heaven. We can give joy to these holy souls here and now as we say:

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SEVENTH DAY:

What food is to a starving man . . . What drink is to the parched sailor riding the tropic seas on a raft . . . What light is to the man long blind . . . What restored health is to the patient invalid . . . What freedom is to the prisoner . . . All this and far, far more is release from purgatory to a holy soul. And when food . . . light . . . health . . . freedom come suddenly, unexpectedly, the human heart leaps and bounds, and the soul knows the sharp ecstasy of joy. So it is with each prayer that we say for the beseeching souls in purgatory. Our prayer is bread and water and light and health; it is a reprieve and a release and freedom and a home-coming. It is the cutting of bonds, the lessening of weary waiting, the termination of exile, the sudden glorious lift that picks them up and seems almost to shoot them toward the center of their joy, God Himself. For us that prayer is an almost careless gesture. For us a routine act of charity. . . Prayer, an alms, a bit of fasting, a good deed done . . . forgotten in the doing. For them something beyond price and measure, something for which they can repay us only in the immortal coin of eternity. Such a good deed we perform as we pray:

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EIGHTH DAY:

Then on a happy day release comes. Perhaps for souls whose friends on earth forgot them and for whom because of valid reasons God showed no special consideration that release comes only at the end of long and bitter centuries. Perhaps it comes far sooner than they dared to hope. Their friends have remembered them. Prayers have poured in upon them. God has accepted these in part or in full payment of their debt. But late or soon the release comes, the sentence is finished, the grim gates of purgatory swing open. Ahead are the white and shining portals of the eternal city. Like the rush of light the released soul sweeps upward toward God. Fierce winds have not the fierce intensity that marks this flight of a soul from exile to the happiness for which God destined it. Then in the presence of God there is the moment of triumph, the welcome by the Trinity, the entrance into the heavenly mansion . . . the enthronement of another saint. At that moment shall begin for that soul, an eternity of bliss and incomparable happiness that shall be without flaw, never to be marred by uncertainty or disillusionment. For then, the soul shall possess God for all eternity. We can have part in that swift flight to joy if we pray:

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NINTH DAY:

Joy does not cause the souls in heaven to forget. On the contrary joy makes them more alive to memory. The soul that has entered into bliss does not for a second forget the generous friends on earth who helped him reach God and glory. Now a saint in heaven, he uses to the full his power of intercession. He prays God to be merciful and generous to the generous. By name he mentions to Christ and to Mary those who mentioned his name when he was helpless to help himself. He speaks to the Trinity about his friends. He becomes in effect a mighty benefactor, persuasively beseeching God to extend mercy and grant favors to those who remembered him in purgatory. He prays with the fervor of new-found joy that their passage through life will be safe, their stay in purgatory brief, their entrance into heaven swift and triumphant. He prays that one day they too might behold the beatific vision and see God, face to face through the endlessness of eternity. It is their unselfish urge to share so great a bliss that we ask them to send us help to insure for ourselves a shortened purgatory, we pray

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