

Life Everlasting

Our souls will live forever after our bodies die. God will raise our bodies to new life at the end of the world. It is up to us where we will live after we die. God offers each of us grace, a share in his own life. It makes us able to choose love, to remain faithful to God, and to live with God in heaven after we die. When we get to heaven, we will be saints.

However, if we choose to cut ourselves off from God's life, after we die, we will live far from God in a place of suffering called hell.

Many of us will not be able to enter heaven right after we die. If we have sinned, but have not cut ourselves off completely from God, we might need a time to be purified before we are worthy to be in heaven. Souls that need to be purified go to a place of waiting called purgatory. Souls in purgatory suffer, but they know that one day they will be in heaven.

How do we know which people who have died are in heaven and which are in purgatory? There is no way for us to know.

The Church carefully studies the lives of people who were holy while they were alive. After years of study, many of these holy people are officially given the title "Saint."

This study begins when members of the Catholic community believe that they have witnessed God's love and grace in someone's life. They ask the local bishop to investigate the life of this person. If the bishop agrees that this person might be a candidate for sainthood, he will declare the person "venerable." The local faithful are then encouraged to pray for intercession from this person.

When this person's intercession has been shown to be effective and is confirmed (often represented by a miracle), this person is beatified and given the title "Blessed." The next step after beatification is canonization, which is when a person is given the title "Saint." At the time of canonization, a date is assigned as the feast day for this saint.

But what about people who are in heaven, though no one knows it? The Church has a special feast day on November 1 of each year. It is the Feast of All Saints. On that day we honor all who are in heaven.

It was in the ninth century that Pope Gregory IV designated November 1 as All Saints Day. Over time, the practice developed of remembering others who had died but may still be in need of purification in purgatory. In the 11th century the abbot of Cluny designated November 2 as a day to pray for all the other departed who were not yet living fully in God's presence. This day is celebrated today as All Souls Day.

By placing these two celebrations next to each other on the calendar, the Church reminds us of the bonds the living share with the dead in the Communion of Saints.

Did You Know?

It is up to us to pray for the souls in purgatory, asking God to let them into heaven. Here is one prayer we Catholics pray for the souls in purgatory:

Eternal rest grant to him [her], O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon him [her];
May his [her] soul and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.