

The Month of Remembrance – Why do we pause to Remember?

I am writing this on Remembrance Day and it seemed appropriate to stop and consider why we do services of remembrance, whether it be national days such as Remembrance Day, our parish mass of remembrance, or memorial services and funerals as a family for loved ones who have died. One misconception about such events is that if you don't know the person who has died, that there is no need to attend such an event. The truth is these special events are for the living not the dead. Often the rituals of these events include several elements that help the living in processing the loss they have experienced and honouring the one(s) who have died. These elements include use of music and readings, a gathering together (reception), a time of remembrance, the use of symbols, and use of actions. If you think about each of the examples above, these elements become part of the services.

In Remembrance Day, we take time to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives so that today we may enjoy the freedoms and choices we have as a country. Poppies flourished over the limestone rubble of France and Belgium during World War 1 and become a symbol of "keeping the faith for all who died".

In the church, November is seen as the month of Remembrance. It is a time to pray for the souls of those who have departed before us and not yet reached the joys of Heaven, and for the faithful who are already in Heaven. Pope St Paul VI indicated:

"We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers (CCC, 962)."

As a people of the faith community, we join together in masses on All Saints Day and in memorial masses for this purpose. In addition, the eternal rest prayer can be prayed all year as part of the Rosary in remembering our departed loved ones (Catholic Culture, 2021).

*Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive,
from Thy bounty through Christ, our Lord, Amen.
And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

Lastly, during the pandemic, some families have needed to delay or chose not to have a funeral service when their loved one has died. Dr. Alan Wolfelt reminds us that funerals are not for closure because grief is life long, but rather it initiates the process of mourning the loss experienced. He indicated "hundreds of grieving families in myriad complicated loss situations have taught me over the decades, it often feels impossible to embark on the grief journey in situations in which the mourners couldn't be by the dying person's side, spend adequate time with the body after the death, or hold the funeral they needed." His experience validates that these services of remembrance are truly for the living.

So this November, take time to pause and reflect on those who have sacrificed for us, for the souls of the faithful in our church, and think about and maybe have a conversation with your loved ones about the service you would want as part of them remembering and honouring your life.

Links for more Information

Facts About Poppies <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/information-for/educators/quick-facts/poppy>

Praying for the dead and gaining indulgences during November:
<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3888>

Elements of a good funeral <https://www.funeralbasics.org/elements-meaningful-funeral/>