

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ (John 21.15)

As I look out the back-garden window, everything looks dead. The fall colours have lost their luster. And as I gaze out the front window of my house, I see that the enormous maple has lost most of its leaves. Summer has left us and another Canadian winter looms.

From the church hymn, ‘Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise’, Walter C. Smith wrote in its third verse, ‘We blossom, then wither as leaves on a tree, but you live forever, who are and will be.’ As our gardens move toward death, so do we. As the fall season takes away our summer, we prepare for the winter temperatures and the first onslaught of snow. We love Jesus in our blossoming and in our fading. He lives forever and as we live for him in this life, we will live with him forever in the next.

I write this reflection on the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day). More intensely than any other day of the year, I think about my loved ones and friends who have gone before me. I will pray for them regularly this month. Loving memories flood back of the times spent with my mother, my Grandparents and other relatives who have died. I remember days spent with friends and acquaintances like Jim, Janine, Nancy and Jerry. So many of them have gone before me.

This is one way that I can respond to our Lord’s question to St. Peter and to me: by praying for the dead. Yes, Lord, I love you and I love all those you have put into my life. Many are still alive, and some have died. I have tried to love them as best as I can. We pray for the living and the dead.

Some of our loved ones and friends don’t need our prayers; they’ve already reached the Promised Land. And others are still journeying in the state we name as Purgatory; we continue to pray for these holy souls.

When I used to ride to Assumption School, one eerie but beautiful memory was going through Holy Sepulcher Cemetery the day after All Souls Day. In the early morning darkness, the whole cemetery was lit up with candles at many of the graves. It was as if the whole place was waiting for something. Electric lights flickered and shone as far as I could see. Just like the holy souls waiting to behold the beatific vision, I thought.

When we pray for our dearly departed loved ones, we are responding affirmatively, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” We are feeding his lambs, our brothers and sisters in Christ who have gone before us.

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