

# A case for November as our liturgical pinnacle

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JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS

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Our journey to holiness, to becoming gradually the Spirit-filled persons God intends, is shaped by our Catholic tradition. Among the ways that happens is through the liturgical year, which channels or directs the flow of our worship of God and our reflections on our relationship with God.

If someone asked, “what month of the liturgical year do you think is most important?” I imagine a lot of us would say the

month of Easter, because we are taught the preeminence of that feast and of belief in the Resurrection. Others might choose December out of our delight in Christmas. A few might even choose the month plus of Lent, when we course correct our spiritual lives.

I suggest we consider November! November is the month that engages our memory, that nudges us to look at death (and who wants to do that!), and that sums up our spiritual journey with the foundational image and inspirational vision of the Kingdom.

We begin November remembering the souls of our departed. The engaging animated film “Coco,” based on celebration of the Day of the Dead in Mexico, portrays how remembering our dead keeps them alive in us; we share the same lineage, and through this remembering we have a better sense of ourselves as souls connected to the past and not only to the all engrossing present. But perhaps understated in the movie is that remembering our deceased also confronts us “with the emotions — the feelings, the fears, the struggles — that remain in us yet as unfinished questions, as unresolved pain and unfinished joys.” Why is this true? Because we don’t remember our deceased as they were, we remember them as we experienced them. Remembering them necessarily includes remembering our own past lifetime. And so these memories “tell us what is yet to be done. They become a blueprint for tomorrow that shows us...how to live, how to love, how to forget, how to go on again.” (Joan Chittister, *The Gift of Years*, p 156). Reflecting on all this, what in our pasts do we need to embrace and what do we need to be freed from? This is some of the inner work that the devotional practices surrounding All Souls Day invite us to do.

November’s readings also ask us to reflect on death—our own death that became inevitable the day we were born, death dealing

events going on around us, and end times in our lives. We will hear this month that we are baptized into the death of the Lord, that we are saved from the wrath, that Christ will appear at the end of time to those who await him, that the Son of Man will come in the clouds with great power and glory on a day no one knows, and other similar scriptures. The language of these scriptures is imaginative and symbolic, and their scope is all time and all creation. Listening, we begin to understand our lifetime within the continual beginnings and endings that make up time. “End time” is happening for all of us during life. Consider all the endings you have experienced! Have you ended being a student, ended being young and comely, ended being single, ended living in a certain place, ended jobs, ended having living parents, ended having children living with you, ended being healthy? Each ending includes loss, a kind of dying. Dying is hard and scary. Jesus died because he was human, a man, and all humans die. But we often live as though we won’t ever die. We put off our inner work like reflecting on end times in our lives, we put off focusing more on things of the spirit. November sounds the Advent theme: Wake up! Pay attention! November’s apocalyptic scriptures from the Book of Revelation and the prophet Daniel told people about their idolatrous culture which subverted good people to the power of evil. As we hear them today, these scriptures invite us to look at death dealing forces around us. What in our culture subverts our good intentions, our wish daily to love and serve God?

The solemnity of Christ the King closes November and the liturgical year. Jesus Christ cannot be explained without talking about the kingdom, the kingdom of truth, the kingdom of his Father, the kingdom on earth, the kingdom he has made us priests of (Revelation 1:3, reading for Nov. 25). This is the “everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away.” The servant King with his kingdom of truth and justice reassures us that no matter what happens to us in our life journey, accompanied by the power of God’s love and goodness, we will live. This is the blessed assurance given us as we begin a new liturgical year.

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