

ABOUT MEMORIAL DAYS

Remember, O Lord and Savior, our parents and grandparents, all our ancestors and elders, who from the beginning until these last days, have died in righteousness and true faith.

(Matins Ode 4 of the Canon for Saturday of the Departed).

The Holy Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, unites all baptized believers, whether they are still here on earth, whether they are already in glory in heaven, or whether they can still atone for their sins in purgatory. That is why we speak of a Church that is militant, glorified and patient in suffering. All members of this triune Church are bound together by the same love of God and neighbor. We call this mutual union of all the faithful on earth, the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory the communion of saints. The saints in heaven, by their intercession before God, can and do help us on earth and also the souls in purgatory. And the souls in purgatory can pray for us too, but they can't help themselves, because the time of their merits on earth is over. But we can help them with our prayers, good deeds and, above all, the sacrifice of the Holy and Divine Liturgy.

And it is on the doctrine of the holy faith about the communion of saints that the ancient practice of the Church is based, to pray for those who have departed into eternity. On this practice, the Second Vatican Council states in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church:

While fully acknowledging this community of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church on earth from the very beginning of the Christian religion cherished the memory of the dead with great piety" (§ 50).

Although the Church remembers the souls of the dead in her daily prayers and services, she still, as a good mother, appoints some more days of remembrance and prayer for the dead during the church year. These commemorations, memorials, are called all-souls days, and are for the memory of all the faithful departed.

MEMORIAL SATURDAYS

Saturday is a day of prayer for the dead

In our church calendar, not only is every day of the year dedicated to some holy day or saint, but every day of the week has a special dedication also.

On Monday, the Holy Church honors the angelic choirs, which occupy the first place in heaven after the Blessed Virgin. Tuesday is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, because he is a symbol of all the prophets. On Wednesday we remember the betrayal of Jesus Christ and the beginning of His passions and pay homage to the Life-Giving Cross on which our Savior died. On Thursday we honor the Holy Apostles and our holy father St. Nicholas. On Friday we pay homage to Christ's sufferings and his death on the cross.

On the Saturday, the Sabbath, the Lord God rested after the creation of the world, and on Saturday Jesus Christ rested in the grave, saving the human race; therefore, Saturday became a symbol of eternal rest and happiness in God. The Church has dedicated Saturday to all the saints who have departed into eternity but have not yet entered into eternal and blissful rest with the saints in heaven. The Mother of God does not have a separate day of the week, because every day of the week the Church glorifies her in her worship services. Three days a week (Wednesday, Friday and Sunday) the Blessed Virgin Mary is especially glorified in connection with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which she took an active part.

SATURDAY BEFORE MEATFARE

In addition to the remembrance of the dead every Saturday of the week, we also have some Saturdays (Sabbaths) in our church year where the church services are entirely dedicated to the prayers and remembrance of the dead. We call those Saturdays suffrage or all-souls days. These include the Saturday before Meatfare Sunday, the second, third and fourth Saturdays of Lent, and the Saturday before Pentecost.

Meatfare Sunday commemorates the Day of Judgment. Fittingly then on the Sabbath (Saturday) before that we pray "for all Christians who have died from the ages," that is, for all those who have ever died or perished somewhere, for whom, perhaps, no one ever prays: That they may all stand uncondemned with the sheep before the eternal Judge, on his right side, having given "a good account before the fearsome judgment-seat of Christ," as we pray in the liturgy (litany before the Our Father).

THE SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH SATURDAYS OF LENT

Lent is not only a time of fasting and penance, but also of prayer for the dead. For this purpose, three All Souls Saturdays during the Great Fast (Lent) are allocated. During Lent, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated only on Saturdays and Sundays, and on other days the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated. In order for the dead not to be left without the graces and merits of the Divine Liturgy, these Saturdays in Lent are appointed for a special commemoration of the dead.

KONTAKION OF THE DEAD:

(Tone 8)

With the saints, O Christ, give rest to the souls of Your servants, where there is no pain, sorrow, nor mourning, but life everlasting.

SUNDAY OF MEATFARE

"...as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

The first feelings we have from the words of the Gospel of Lent are punishment and fear. However, the purpose of this doomsday science is not to cause fear of punishment for sins. Of course, God's love is just, but this justice is not a manifestation of any violence against man, because love knows no violence. The words of the Apostle John testify to this, "God is love. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love" (1 Jn. 4:16, 18).

The main idea of the Gospel this Sunday is good deeds in the life of a Christian, not God's punishment. Jesus focuses on good works. In almost every sentence of his teaching, Jesus Christ speaks of man's good deeds, or their lack of. With such thoughts of today's Gospel, the Holy Church wants not to frighten us, but to warn us not to sin, not to be careless and indifferent to God's commandments, to do good deeds, and to work even harder on our lives in order to earn merit in heaven through good deeds.

In his Epistle to the early Christians, the Apostle James pays much attention to faith in the spiritual life combined with good works. He writes, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). When a Christian's faith does not lead him to union with God, it is of no use. Evil spirits also believe in the existence of God, but do not love Him. "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit" (James 2:14-16)?

Today's Gospel clearly and consistently shows that man's salvation depends on both God and man himself, or rather from the presence or absence of good deeds. The evangelist Matthew writes, "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done" (Matt. 16:27). The Apostle Paul teaches, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10). In the last chapter of the Revelation of John the Theologian, we read, "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done" (Rev. 22:11-12).

A young and beautiful girl was sunbathing on the beach when a ten-year-old boy approached her and asked, "Excuse me, do you believe in God?" Surprised by the question, she said, "Yes." The boy continued, "Do you go to church every week?" The girl again replied, "Yes." Without hesitation he asked a third question, "Do you read the Bible and pray every day?" The girl answered again, "Yes." The little man sighed with relief and said, "Can you hold my money while I go swimming?"

Strange as this situation may seem, people expect certain behavior from Christians.

Dear Believers! You should not seek God in the beauty of the sunset, the miracle of the birth of a child or the invincible power of the elements. It is difficult to find in theological treatises. The true and only God, the Creator of the universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hides in the faces and hearts of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners. The lesson of this parable is to see God in these people and to show our faith with love.

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