

## All Souls - 2023

By [Fr. Shannon Kearns](#)

Today we celebrate All Souls a day to remember all of the people who have died. It's one of my favorite feasts of the church.

We live in a culture that is, in many ways, obsessed with death. From the violence of movies and video games (and the ways that violence is more acceptable to see than say, [sexuality](#)) to the news that says, "If it bleeds, it leads." Crime shows are popular season after season focusing on the death of innocents and the people who kill them.

It's strange, then, that in a culture so fixated on violence, that we don't do very well with dying and death. We lack rituals and traditions that would aid us in our mourning. We hide death away and pretend that it doesn't exist and then we expect people to grieve quickly and quietly and move on.

That's why an observance like the feast of All Souls stands in such contrast to how we usually deal with death and dying. Here is a day that asks us to stop and to remember. This day asks us to call to mind all of the people that have died; to remember them and to honor them. It asks us to look squarely at death. In some ways it asks us to confront our own mortality and the reality that someday we will all die. That can be scary and overwhelming. It can cause all sorts of emotions to well up within us.

But it also an opportunity to reframe our narratives around death and dying. In Mexico there is a tradition called *Día de los Muertos* or Day of the Dead. It's celebrated at this same time of the year, but the festival takes on a different tone. The celebration is about more than just remembering the dead, it's also about being connected to them. People build private altars with photos, they add mementos of the people they love, they cook (and pour out) the favorite foods and drinks of the dead, and they visit their graves and tell stories. The belief is that the dead can hear the stories being told and know that they are being remembered.

There is something so beautiful in this act of remembrance; in setting aside time to remember and to honor those who have died. Not only that but to believe that we are still connected to one another.

This day is a call to us to remember our identities as people of the resurrection. We remember that death does not have the final word and because of death not having the final word we are able to face death and dying with honesty. We are able to admit that we fear dying even though we know death isn't the end. We are able to name that sometimes death is unfair, or comes too soon, or is painful or cruel. And by admitting and facing all of these things we are able to take away some of the sting of death. We are able to remove some of the power that death holds over us. And when that power is removed we see death as the beginning of new life. We are able to see that the veil that separates us from those who have died isn't permanent, nor is it impenetrable.

Instead, we remember that **we belong to one another** and are part of each other still. This is a mystery in a lot of ways, but this observance helps us to live in the mystery by creating the rituals that we need to mourn and grieve and celebrate.

We also know that in the midst of grief it is okay to bring joy and celebration into our mourning and [remembrance](#). We grieve the loss of our loved ones but we also tell the stories of what we have learned from them or the times when we laughed together. By bringing them into the forefront of our minds we bring their presence closer to us. We do all of this knowing that death is not the end; that when we die we enter into the arms of God who loves us. And everyone who dies becomes a part of that great cloud of witnesses who continue to cheer on those of us who are still living.

We know that in our living and in our dying we are never alone. We are a part of a great love, a great community, and we belong to one another.

There is a song by a band called "Delta Rae" and the chorus goes like this:

"When I die

I don't want to rest in peace

I want to dance in joy

During this holy time of remembrance let us mourn and celebrate. Let us remember those who have impacted our lives, let us learn from the examples of the saints, let us **remember that we all continue to belong to one another.**