

All Souls Day  
November 2, 2014 (8:00a, 10:00a; 5:00 pm)  
Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Romans 5:5-11; John 6:37-40

“For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly.” These words of Saint Paul in today’s Letter to the Romans signal to us our complete powerlessness in the face of our own judgment. The death of our Savior turns enemies into redeemed members of the Body of Christ. His blood saves us from wrath.

There is one line in the liturgy for All Soul’s Day that often gets overlooked. In the final couplet of the *Dies Irae*, attributed to Thomas of Celano, friend and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi, we hear: *Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem.* “Loyal, affectionate, tender, devoted Lord Jesus...grant them rest.” These are just some of the words employed to translate this Latin phrase. *Pie* is in the seldom-used *vocative* case of the word *pius*.<sup>1</sup> It is the case used when someone is directly calling out to another. We can think of the English word “evoke.” Thus, we say—O merciful, O compassionate, O tender Jesus...calling out to our Savior. It almost defies translation, this little word that carries with it such a rich meaning.

When put to music, the evocative melody itself serves as an invitation to meditate on God’s mercy. It is the only part of the *Dies Irae* that survives in Faure’s *Requiem*. We cannot escape judgment, no matter how much we try. Our faith beckons us to face the primordial human reality of the brevity and fragility of life. The issues facing our state, nation and world also serve to bring out the stark reality of these times. Many are very concerned about the implications of Tuesday’s elections. And so our faith must comfort, if nothing else will. Judgment and mercy seem to compete with one another. Who will win?

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<sup>1</sup> *pius, pia pium; piissimus -a -um* ADJ conscientious; upright; faithful; patriotic/dutiful, respectful; righteous; good; affectionate, tender, devoted, loyal (to family); pious, devout; holy, godly

While it is very useful to meditate on God's judgment, it is also important to meditate upon his mercy. Both are necessary, lest our spiritual life becomes unbalanced. In writing about mercy, Augustine gives voice that, not only ought we to seek God's mercy—we ought to be so bold as to demand it:

Let us have no qualms about exacting (*exigere*) mercy from the Lord our God. He really does want to be asked...Do you want to know how God shows you mercy? Show love yourself! Let's see if there is a limit, while you are showing it. How lavish it all is at the highest (*sumitate*), if so much is in the image.<sup>2</sup>

Saint Paul also reminds us in the epistle that *God proves His love for us* through the death of Christ. If God is willing to prove His love for us, what are we willing to do in return? How will we witness to God's limitless mercy?

One such witness to God's mercy is discerned in the composition featured for today's Mass. Written in the late 1880's, Gabriel Faure's entire *Requiem* has only 30 bars of *fortissimo* singing— and most of it doesn't rise above *mezzoforte*. When interviewed in 1902 about the musical uniqueness of his composition, Faure himself remarked:

It has been said that my *Requiem* does not express the fear of death and someone has called it a lullaby of death. But it is thus that I see death: as a happy deliverance, an aspiration towards happiness above, rather than as a painful experience.”

May our meditation today lead us to a greater realization of the need to seek God's mercy and recognize His tremendous love for us. Meditating upon mercy forgetful of judgment is a lie; meditating on Judgment absent of mercy is futile and hopeless.

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<sup>2</sup> en. Ps. 32.2.2.28. cf. Alan Fitzgerald, OSA entry “Mercy” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, p. 557

Some Church fathers saw judgment less as a doctrine to frighten us, as much as one that shows forth our free will. We have choices in this life, choices that have real consequences. The aim of God's judgment is to stimulate the free will to flee evil and to turn towards the good.

You may be surprised how much of our most ancient Christian art derives from funeral monuments in Rome. More often than not, the one constant element in these works is Christ's gesture of welcoming the soul into his Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Primitive Christian art was pervaded by a sense in which the judgment was complete and the comforting scenes were those of souls being received by Christ into Paradise.

It is precisely this *receptio* that remains our constant desire, both for ourselves and our deceased loved ones for whom we especially offer our fervent prayers today. I close with this prayer from the Eastern Liturgy that beautifully sums up our humble plea for God's merciful love:

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, the physician of both souls and bodies, for I am weak. As if standing before the fearful seat of judgment as if touching your immaculate feet, so I implore, entreat and supplicate you with a broken and humbled heart. Be merciful to me, a sinner.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Vatican website on the art of the Catacombs:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_commissions/archeo/inglese/documents/rc\\_com\\_archeo\\_doc\\_20011010\\_catacrist\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/archeo/inglese/documents/rc_com_archeo_doc_20011010_catacrist_en.html)

<sup>4</sup> The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom