

## PRAYING FOR THE HOLY SOULS: THE VALUE OF MASS INTENTIONS

At morning Mass last Tuesday, I accidentally read out the wrong name for the Mass intention of the day. Perhaps my Guardian Angel was looking out for me, but I glanced at the sheet again right before the Gospel and caught the error. After the homily I announced the correct name and continued as usual. No, I did not do so out of a sense of self-deprecation or humility. I did so because it is critical that a priest make an **act of the will** in offering an intention for someone who has arranged a Mass offering. This is a venerable custom in the Church (since at least the 9th century), though one that we rarely discuss. Where did this come from? The custom of praying for the dead goes back centuries earlier than that, and epitaphs offer some of our best proof. The epitaph on the tomb of Abercius (†180 A.D.), Bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia (modern Turkey), begs for prayers for the repose of his soul. “Verily I was passing through my seventy-second year. He that discerneth these things, every fellow-believer [namely], let him pray for Abercius.”

In many parts of the world, priests are **solely dependent** upon such Mass offerings for their own sustenance, especially in mission territories. When as a young priest I helped in the native missions of the Northwest Territories (Canada) for Holy Week, I was shocked that the people tried to pay me by simply taking money from the Holy Thursday collection. I couldn’t accept, saying that I was donating the cost of my flight as my gift. The 1917 Code used the language of “Mass alms or stipends,” but the 1983 Code employs the phrase “Mass offerings.” Semantics, you say? Well, not so fast. In its derivation, the word *stipend* connotes a fee for a service rendered, whereas the word *offering* signifies a donation made for the honor of God and/or for the support of the Church. Thus, a Mass offering is a **freewill donation** that expresses a personal desire for an intention to be remembered at a particular Mass (cf. Canon #946).

In arranging for a Mass, such as on the anniversary of the death of a loved one, a priest is **committing himself** to celebrate a Mass according to the desire of the person making the offering. The person is not “buying” the Mass, for that is impossible. Language matters. In offering Mass for a particular intention, the priest is carrying out a spiritual act through which he commends the intention to God in a particular way. This is one reason why it is more helpful when the intention is specific—a name suffices. It is difficult to offer a daily Mass for someone’s “Special Intention,” so we assiduously discourage that. Our **bulletin lists the intentions** for each day, which I announce at the daily Masses; it is a little more difficult at a Sunday Mass with an entrance hymn, etc. We also indicate with a symbol (†) for the deceased, an (A) for a wedding anniversary, (B) for a birthday.

“By making this offering, the faithful associate themselves more intimately with Christ who offers himself in the Sacred Host and obtain thereby more abundant fruits.” (cf. Pope Paul VI’s apostolic letter “Firma in Traditione” of June 13, 1974). It is imperative that the faithful not develop a perception that a priest is “trafficking” in collecting stipends for services rendered. In fact, if he celebrates multiple Masses, in those dioceses where priests do retain their stipends (i.e. factored into their salary), then he may keep only one per day. Because the Mass has the same value as Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary (i.e. infinite), objectively speaking the number of intentions that may be offered is not limited. Still, the Church **normally** allows only one intention with a stipend united to each Mass. A priest may not “accumulate” many stipends for each single Mass. This would be an **abuse of the sacrament**, and the practice is strictly forbidden.

The Mass for All Souls is different in that a **collective intention** for that Mass is expressly allowed on certain occasions by the Congregation for the Clergy: “In cases in which the people making the offering, have been previously explicitly informed and have freely consented to combining their offerings in a single offering, their intentions can be satisfied with a single Mass celebrated according to a ‘collective’ intention” (1991, Article 2. #1). That is precisely what we did on All Souls Day, when we placed all the names on the high altar. As the above-mentioned document stated, “the Holy See has always followed the evolution of this pious tradition with attention, with opportune interventions to provide for adaptations to the changing social and cultural situations...” The Church accommodates these varying situations and seeks to make more general theological and liturgical clarifications when there may be a danger of misunderstanding.

Our Archdiocesan policy states: “There is a uniform Mass stipend of \$7.00. Mass stipends become the property

of the parish treasury.” Every pastor is to provide that **one Sunday Mass** be offered **pro populo**, that is “For the people,” as opposed to a Mass with a specific intention. No offering is accepted for this Mass, and you will notice the intention is listed in the bulletin as “Cathedral Parish– For the People.” The pious practice of praying in remembrance of our beloved dead highlights our belief in the dogma of the Communion of Saints, one of the most comforting teachings of our Catholic Faith. Make it a point to visit a cemetery this month, offering prayers at the tomb of your loved ones.

- Coincidence? Just a week after being spotted by a member of the faithful entering a liquor store (for a wedding gift!), I received a hand delivered six-pack of specialty **Berghold Brau** (Schell’s beer) from the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, courtesy of Msgr. Doug Grams,, New Ulm’s Vicar General. Their Cathedral celebrated its 150th anniversary, and he included a beautiful commemorative booklet marking the occasion. Sincere thanks—but if my libationary frequency holds to form, I hope the brew has a long shelf life!
- Last week confirmed what a reliable source told me in September– **O’Gara’s Bar and Grill**, a St. Paul fixture for 75+ years, will not reopen. O’Gara’s has been a gracious host for Cathedral Young Adult **Theology on Tap** sessions for years. The owners, Dan and Kris O’Gara cited the **changing regulatory environment** and increased competition from taprooms, among their reasons. But they will keep their location at the State Fair, which by the looks of it, is packed all day long!
- As we recall the beautiful funeral for Archbishop Harry Flynn on September 30, it reminds us to pray not only for our deceased relatives, but also our deceased shepherds. He was one of **147 bishops** worldwide who died between All Souls’ Day 2017-2018.
- I am asking for your **prayerful consideration** to support a special appeal to install **security cameras** throughout the Church and the property. An **extremely generous** donor has stepped up with substantial seed money, but we need to raise additional funds to fully complete the project. I truly believe this will provide peace of mind and in the event of trouble, a ready source of evidence. I want to start with the interior of the main Church first. A **special collection** will be taken on November 24, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel  
Rector