

## ***The Way of the Cross for the Souls of Purgatory***

The Diocese of Trenton Catholic Cemeteries Ministry is doing something that is almost unheard of these days in the United States. The beautiful Catholic tradition of walking the Way of the Cross for the Souls of Purgatory in the sacredness of a Catholic cemetery is alive. Jesus Bread of Life Cemetery & Mausoleum, in Mount Laurel New Jersey, is living this most profound practice during a time of atonement and “returning to God”, in the season of Lent.

While many countries still hold the sacredness of a Catholic Cemetery and the praying for the souls in purgatory with reverence, the U.S is fallen behind in a secular dominated country. Yet, in the Diocese of Trenton, Jesus Bread of Life Cemetery offers this wonderful practice back into its Cemetery Ministry. Over 60 plus families of those resting in peace at Jesus Bread of Life Cemetery from the surrounding community continue to come together in this wonderful blessed tradition.

During the “Stations of the Cross for the Souls of Purgatory” at Jesus Bread of Life Mausoleum, which is the length of a football field, the stations are lined along the corridors of the massive hallways. The stations are individually dressed in long robes of purple and the images of the stations are wrapped inside. Each participant is given a prayer book and join in prayerful procession with Deacon David O’Connor; Diocesan Director of Catholic Cemeteries. Incense is used at every station as these beautiful prayers rise up to heaven. As the book of Revelation 8:3-5 shares, “And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel”. A very powerful African American spiritual hymn, “Were You There”, is sung at the end of every station in the acoustically rich hallowed halls of this magnificent Mausoleum. Families of the dearly departed are filled with deep spiritual emotion as the movement of the Holy Spirit is known to be ever present and palpable.

St. Pope John Paul II says that praying for the souls in purgatory is "the highest act of supernatural charity" The souls in Purgatory hold a place of high esteem in the Catholic Faith. These are our relatives and friends who have gone before us. Before living the beatific vision they must spend a time of purification. They depend on us to shorten their stay in purgatory and speed up their entrance into heaven. Although there is suffering in this period of purification, there is also simultaneous joy. As St. Catherine of Genoa says, "For the souls in purgatory there is great joy as well as pain as they know for certain they are bound for heaven"!

St. Catherine of Genoa was a saint mystic who lived the experience of purgatory and speaks of it in her Treatise on Purgatory. She is beautifully quoted, "I believe that no happiness can be found worthy to be compared with that of the souls in Purgatory except that of the Saints in Paradise...And that day-by-day this happiness grows as God flows into souls, more and more as a hindrance to his entrance is consumed, and as more and more the soul opens itself up to the divine inflowing." WOW! The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030).

When we lose a family member, one of the things that hurts the most is what we could not do for them in their pain in their last days. Oh, how we wish we could just take their pain and make it all go away. The fears they may have felt at in those last moments, we often contemplate. It makes the heart just cringe in raw pain when you realize that there was nothing you could have done for the one you loved the most; however, there is a gift in Purgatory, a beautiful gift.

Not just a gift for the soul that is being purified who will soon see the beatific vision; but, it is gift for us who are left behind because we now have the opportunity to do something for those we loved so much here on earth. We have a chance to lessen their pain on this side of glory as they can be witness of your love for them, even

know. They know you pray for them. They see you. They hear you. And I have heard it shared that when we get to heaven those who finally entered because of our prayer will recognize us and it will be made known to us how many souls we helped. Here is why we pray for "All" our loved ones souls and for those who have no one to pray for them.

To be able to pray for the souls of purgatory so that they may speed through the purification process is a grace unlike any other. By praying and making sacrifices for the Holy Souls, we have the power and privilege to relieve their pain. We have the power of the saints in heaven to help free the souls of purgatory. We can have the privilege of being the apostle of Mary, Mother of the Church Suffering, in helping the souls in purgatory.

"It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins", from the book of Maccabees. "Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective." Catechism of the Catholic Church: 958. This is amazing! Prayer is reciprocal! We, a Catholic community of believers, pray for each other and the souls in purgatory. The Glorious church, Saints in heaven, pray for us and the souls in purgatory. The souls in purgatory, soon to become Saints, pray for us! What an incredible Body of Christ!

Please come and join your Catholic community for the Stations of the Cross, at Jesus Bread of Life Cemetery & Mausoleum, every Friday during Lent at 3PM. Please come and join in praying for the souls in purgatory. You may have a grand escort of saints to help when you finally arrive home in heaven. 609-317-6400