

## The Commemoration of All Faithful Departed - The Feast of “All Souls”

At this Feast we commemorate before God, in thanksgiving, all those who have gone before us with the sign of faith. In the early days of the Christian Church the names of all the faithful departed were read at each Mass from the *Diptych*.

Over time this changed to regular prayers for the faithful departed, which was practiced during the Reformation as is cited in the *Apology* and in Martin Chemnitz’s *Examination of the Council of Trent*. He writes “...in the history of antiquity remembrance was made in the prayers of the church also of the departed, whose souls the godly commend to God in their prayers... our Apology says that we do not prohibit prayers for the dead... also Luther in his confession permits this.”

That we not be misled to think that our commemoration of the faithful departed in any way seeks or effects a change in the eternal disposition of the faithful departed, Chemnitz continues “However all sane people know that it does not follow by any kind of necessity.”

Observance of the Feast of All Souls was codified over a thousand years ago. Doctrinal abuses during the dark ages and medieval period, especially in Germany, led the churches of the Reformation to stop observing All Souls, and Luther to write against the annual observance of a *Requiem*.

While the final Sunday of the Church Year, *Totenfest*, is the commemoration of the faithful departed of the parish, All Souls commemorates the Christian departed of all times and places, as does the Feast of All Saints. The Feast of All Saints focuses on joy and bliss of the Church in Glory, the Feast of All Souls reminds us that physical death is for the Christian the “last enemy” (*1 Corinthians 15:26*), for us the portal to life eternal.

The Feast of All Souls uses the Propers of the *Requiem* or funeral Mass. *Requiem* is a Latin word that means “rest”, as we sing in the Introit for today: “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord...” The historic sequence hymn for the Feast of All Souls is *Dies Irae*, paraphrased for us in the hymn “Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning,” sung today.

A right remembrance of the faithful departed is explained by Chemnitz in his *Examination*: “Therefore the prayers of the ancients for the dead were not satisfactions for the sins of the dead, not redemptions of their souls from the fire of purgatory, but public celebrations, applications, and sealings of the divine promises about the forgiveness of sins, the repose, and the salvation of those who died piously: they were instructions and exhortations for the living; they were consolations and strengthening of the grieving; and they were declarations of kindly affections of the mind toward the departed.” It is in this spirit, the spirit of our Lutheran fathers in the faith, that we observe the Commemoration of All Faithful Departed.

Cover: ‘The Last Judgment’ by the Master of the Bambino Vispo, c. 1422 A. ✘ D.

# The Commemoration



# of All Faithful Departed