

Totenfest - The Last Sunday of the Church Year

At this Feast we commemorate before God, in thanksgiving, those Parish departed who have gone before us with the sign of faith in the last year. The name *Totenfest* is German, taken from the words for “death” and “feast.” The observance of *Totenfest* reveals the Prussian roots of Zion’s founding fathers.

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.”

While All Souls (November 2) commemorates the Christian departed of all times and places, as does the Feast of All Saints (November 1), *Totenfest*, celebrated on the Last Sunday of the Church Year, is the commemoration of the faithful departed of the parish. 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 Propers for *Totenfest* are the historic texts read and sung by the Holy Church for many, many centuries.

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, remembering before God in thanksgiving those who have departed our Parish in faith in the last year, in the spirit of our Lutheran fathers in the faith and the Church catholic, that we observe *Totenfest*.

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

Totenfest



The Last Sunday Of the Church Year