

This page has been archived and is no longer updated.

Find out more about page archiving.

All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day

Last updated 2011-10-20

All Saints' Day is a feast day celebrated on 1st November. All Souls' Day, 2nd November, is a time to pray for departed souls.

All Saints' Day

All Saints' Day (also known as All Hallows' Day or Hallowmas) is the day after **All Hallows' Eve** (Hallowe'en). It is a feast day celebrated on **1st November** by **Anglicans** and **Roman Catholics**.

It is an opportunity for believers to remember all saints and martyrs, known and unknown, throughout Christian history. As part of this day of obligation, believers are required to attend church and try not to do any servile work.

Remembering saints and martyrs and dedicating a specific day to them each year has been a Christian tradition since the 4th century AD, but it wasn't until 609AD that Pope Boniface IV decided to remember *all* martyrs. Originally 13th May was designated as the Feast of All Holy Martyrs. Later, in 837AD, Pope Gregory IV extended the festival to remember all the saints, changed its name to Feast of All Saints and changed the date to 1st November.

We celebrate today the solemnity of All Saints. This invites us to turn our gaze to the immense multitude of those who have already reached the blessed land, and points us on the path that will lead us to that destination.

Pope John Paul II, All Saints' Day 2003

All Souls' Day

All Souls' Day is marked on **2nd November** (or the **3rd** if the 2nd is a Sunday), directly following All Saints' Day, and is an opportunity for Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholic churches to commemorate the faithful departed. They remember and pray for the souls of people who are in Purgatory - the place (or state) in which those who have died atone for their less grave sins before being granted the vision of God in Heaven (called *Beatific vision*).

Reasoning behind this stems from the notion that when a soul leaves the body, it is not entirely cleansed from venial (minor) sins. However, through the power of prayer and self-denial, the faithful left on earth may be able to help these souls gain the Beatific Vision they seek, bringing the soul eternal sublime happiness.

A 7/8th century AD prayer *The Office of the Dead* is read out in churches on All Souls' Day. Other rituals include the offering of Requiem Mass for the dead, visiting family graves and reflecting on lost loved ones. In Mexico, on *el día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead), people take picnics to their family graves and leave food out for their dead relatives.

Whilst praying for the dead is an ancient Christian tradition, it was Odilo, Abbot of Cluny (France) who, in 998AD, designated a specific day for remembering and praying for those in the process of purification. This started as a local feast in his monasteries and gradually spread throughout the Catholic Church towards the end of the 10th century AD.

For the souls in purgatory, waiting for eternal happiness and for meeting the Beloved is a source of suffering, because of the punishment due to sin which separates them from God. But there is also the certitude that once the time of purification is over, the souls will go to meet the One it desires.

Letter of Pope John Paul II for Millennium of All Souls' Day

Find out more

- **Hallowe'en - the eve of Hallowmas**
- **The Saints**