

Praying for the Dead

Greetings!

A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to spend All Souls' Day, November 2, at the cemetery with the members of our parish youth group.

I suspect a few of the youth were skeptical at first. It was getting dark when we arrived. Several noted that it was “creepy.” In spite of their reservations, we gave them guidelines about respectful behavior and instructions for praying for the dead—a corporal work of mercy, we reminded them—and then sent them out. As with most youth ministry, we were not sure how the teenagers would react to this experience. They moved respectfully among the headstones, pausing in silence. Later, over milkshakes, they shared their experiences of praying for people they did not know but who had gone before them marked with the sign of faith.

In our culture, we mostly ignore death. One of the great gifts we have as Catholics is the ability to acknowledge the reality of loss that death brings and at the same time articulate our hope: that death is not the end, that we live in the hope of the Resurrection. Because we believe in the Communion of Saints, we know that we remain connected to those who have died, that they continue to be with us.

We know that we remain connected to those who have died.

There are many ways to hand on our tradition of praying for the dead. The month of November, when the whole Church comes together to pray for the dead, is a good time to introduce these traditions. At the beginning of the month, you could make or print a November calendar and invite your child to decorate it. On each day, write the name of someone who has died for whom you would like to pray. Then include that person in your family's prayer intentions for the day.

You can visit the graves of people you love with your family and pray there. You might share stories of their lives or look at pictures of special moments you shared with them.

A special time to pray for someone who has died is at their funeral Mass. As parents, we want to shield our children



During November, families can visit graves of loved ones and tell stories about their lives.

from suffering and we know that sometimes Mass is difficult for little ones, and so we might choose not to bring them to a funeral. But, as in all things, the best way to learn to do something is to practice. When someone important to a child has died, we can give them the opportunity to pray for that person by bringing them to the funeral.

As people of faith, we live in the hope of the Resurrection. By giving children the gift of handing on our prayers for the dead, we help them to understand the mystery of death and give them the ability to live more fully in this hope.