

Spiritual Work of Mercy

To Pray for the Living and the Dead

(Pray for the Living and the Dead – A Meditation on the Seventh Spiritual Work of Mercy)
excerpts from Msgr. Charles Pope – June 15, 2015

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners. He is "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." The Holy Spirit "himself intercedes for us . . . and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Since Abraham, intercession - asking on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks "not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others," even to the point of praying for those who do him harm. (CCC 2634-2635).

Sacred Scripture

Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects (James 5:13-16).



St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, OLM

What is the value of one prayer? I suspect it is far greater than any of us imagine. Prayer changes things, sometimes in obvious ways, more often in subtle and even paradoxical ways. But prayer is surely important, even when we don't experience its immediate effects. Perhaps this is why Jesus taught us to pray always and never to lose heart (cf Luke 18:1). St. Paul echoed this with the simple exhortation "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). St. James also warned, "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2).

So, to pray for the living is a great and wondrous spiritual work of mercy; its value is beyond gold or pearls. Yes, what is the value of one prayer? The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful in its effects (James 5:16). Prayer can avert war, bring healing, cause conversion, bestow peace and serenity, and call down mercy—sweet, necessary, and beautiful mercy. Prayer is inestimable; its value can never be told.

Praying for the dead, however, is a spiritual work of mercy that has suffered in recent decades. Too many Catholics today "miss a step" when loved ones die. There are often immediate declarations that the deceased are "in Heaven" or are "in a better place." But Scripture doesn't say that we go right to Heaven when we die. No, indeed, there is a brief stopover at the judgment seat of Christ. It is a great work of mercy we can extend to our deceased loved ones, to remember them with love and to pray, in the words of St. Paul, May God who has begun a good work in you bring it to completion (Phil 1:6). Pray often for the souls in Purgatory. Surely there are joys there for them, knowing that they are on their way to Heaven.

I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first — by deed, the second — by word, the third — by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy.

Pray for the Living and the Dead

St. Faustina Kowalksa, OLM

Fast Facts:

Born	• August 25, 1905
Feast Day	• October 05
Canonized	• April 30, 2000 by Pope St. John Paul II
Quote	• "Great love can change small things into great ones, and it is only love which lends value to our actions."

Her Life:

- Born in Glogowiec, Poland, in 1905.
- Faustina was the third of ten children.
- Though the family was poor, they were very religious.
- Faustina felt a calling to the religious life as early as seven years of age. She requested to enter the convent after completing her time at school, but her parents would not give her permission.
- At age 16, Faustina worked as a housekeeper in Lodz to help support her family.
- In 1924, Faustina went to a dance in Lodz with her sister. It is there that Faustina had a vision of the suffering Jesus. He instructed her to depart for Warsaw and join a convent.
- She departed the following morning without anyone's knowledge, but several convents would not accept Faustina.
- After several weeks of searching, the mother superior at the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy conditionally accepted Faustina.
- She gained acceptance in the order in 1925 and in 1926 she received her habit and took the religious name Sister Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament.



- In 1930, Faustina arrived at a convent in Plock, where she fell ill. In 1931, she began to write of Jesus appearing to her as the "King of Divine Mercy."
- Faustina went on to write a diary that would later be published as *Divine Mercy In My Soul*.
- After years of visions, she wrote the prayer for the popular devotion of the Divine Mercy Chaplet.
- In 1934, Faustina was introduced to artist Eugene Kazimierowski, who painted the original image of Divine Mercy.
- Faustina spent years fostering devotion to Divine Mercy, which became very popular in Poland at the time, and has since spread worldwide.
- She died on October 5, 1938 at the age of 33.

How is St. Faustina a model for living out the Spiritual Work of Mercy – To Pray for the Living and the Dead?

St. Faustina devoted her life to prayer. So devoted was Faustina that she became a mystic and was granted visions of Jesus Christ. In her prayer, Jesus commanded that she be his instrument for promoting devotion to His Divine Mercy, and that the Feast of Divine Mercy be established and celebrated the Sunday after Easter. St. Faustina is known as the "Apostle of Divine Mercy."

Practices to Foster growth in Prayer for the Living and the Dead

- **Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Prayer for the Living and the Dead*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.**
 - Genesis 50:10; Numbers 20:29; Deuteronomy 34:8
 - 2 Maccabees 12:43-45
 - Luke 11: 1-12
 - Luke 18:1
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- **Catechetical Texts that speak to *Prayer for the Living and the Dead*:**
 - "In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them." Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective (CCC 958).
 - The first Christian communities lived this form of fellowship intensely. Thus the Apostle Paul gives them a share in his ministry of preaching the Gospel but also intercedes for them. The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries: "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions," for persecutors, for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel (CCC 2636).
- **Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Pray for the Living and the Dead*.**
 - Examples: (Tobit, St. Joseph of Cupertino, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Margaret of Antioch)
- **Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Pray for the Living and the Dead*.**