

Preparation for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion Suggested November Ritual

(The proposed ritual takes place during the celebration of Sunday Mass.)

Background

Did you know praying for the dead is a Spiritual Work of Mercy? The entire month of November is dedicated to praying for the souls of the faithful departed, those who have "gone before us marked with the sign of faith". We pray that they have passed from death to life in the company of the Risen Jesus and the saints.

Praying for the dead also brings comfort to us, who are left behind. In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul reminded the Christian community that they were not to "grieve as others do who have no hope" (4:13). In other words, we believe in life after death. We believe that an all-knowing and all-loving God will shepherd His loved ones into union with Him. We believe in heaven, the place of God's unending love; we believe in hell, the place devoid of God's love; and we believe in purgatory, the place of preparation for God's love.

During this month of 'All Souls', the greatest prayer that we can offer for the dead is the prayer of Christ on the Cross, the sacrifice of the Mass. They need us to pray the Rosary asking Mary to speak to her son for our loved ones. They need us to keep the memory of their goodness alive and before the Lord.

We believe that praying for the dead brings the one who prays spiritual comfort and hope. We can assist the dead by our prayers, and they can assist us by theirs.

Preparation

The ritual of lighting a candle in prayer or to pay tribute to a life 'passed' has long been a part of our Christian culture. It is a ritual that promotes reflection, signifies remembrance, and offers hope - the light of the resurrection scatters the darkness of the tomb. Light dispels darkness, nourishes life, and illuminates everything. As such light is a fitting symbol for God, the 'Blessed Saviour', as referred to in the Bible as "the light of the world" [John 8:12].

Provide children with a copied template of a candle.

Each child should take the template home. With their parents' guidance and encouragement, invite them to reflect on what it means to pray for the dead. What it means to remember? Why we remember the ones we love after they have died? Explore the various ways in which we remember. As a family, they should write the names of loved ones who have died on the stem of the candle. (Although greatly loved and fondly remembered, families should be discouraged from mentioning family pets)

The children can decorate the candle. It should be returned to school and where possible laminated. In order to effectively display the remembrance candles, Velcro or Blu Tack should be fixed to the reverse of the candle. During the Mass, or if more appropriate, at the end of Mass, children can be invited to bring forward their candle in a 'procession of remembrance'. They can arrange the candles on a board which will take the Velcro or Blu Tack.

