

Why I Am Catholic

No fear of death

The Church helps us to not be afraid of death and to remain connected to those who have gone before us.

The Catholic sense of death goes back much more to the beginnings of Christianity than Protestant churches that started after 1520. Until the year 312, it was against the laws of the Roman Empire to be a Christian. For them, the Roman Emperor was a deity and subjects were required to worship him and offer public sacrifice. Not doing this led to persecution, arrest, torture, and often a public death. The Church was built on the blood of martyrs. In those years, the roots of All Saints Day and All Souls Day began. In Rome, masses were often celebrated in the Catacombs and near the tombs of holy men and women later declared saints. The Catacombs were an underground network of tunnels where Catholic Christians met to celebrate mass and eventually where many of the first martyrs were buried.

The celebration of a feast for martyrs is first mentioned in the fourth century by St. Ephrem of Edessa. In 609/610, the Roman Pantheon was dedicated on May 13 under the title of St. Mary and Martyrs. "Many see in this the origin of All Saints Day. For reasons which are unclear, Pope Gregory IV (827-844) transferred the feast from May to 1 November." (*The Order of Prayers*) Eastern Catholics and the Orthodox still celebrate this feast on May 13.

"Rooted in ancient Christian tradition (2nd century and Tertullian), St. Odilo of Cluny established a memorial of all the faithful departed in 988. It was accepted in Rome in the 13th century." (*The Order of Prayers*) Tertullian writes in 211 "that Christians offered prayer and the Eucharist for the deceased on the anniversaries of their death. (www.catholicapologetics.org)

He also writes: "In the blood of the martyrs lies the seed of the Church." (*Apologeticum*)

Today we pray for those who died who lived lives of faith; everyone from the great saints to family and friends who were the "ordinary saints." We also pray that we will be ready.

Thomas a Kempis writes in his *The Imitation of Christ*: "Every action of yours, every thought, should be those of one who expects to die before the day is out. Death would have no great terrors for you if you had a quiet conscience. . . Then why not keep clear of sin instead of running away from death? If you aren't fit to face death today, it's very unlikely you will be tomorrow. . ." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1014)

Because of Christ's Resurrection, St. Paul and the faithful departed can say: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (I Cor 15:55) And the words of psalm 84: "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere." (v. 11)