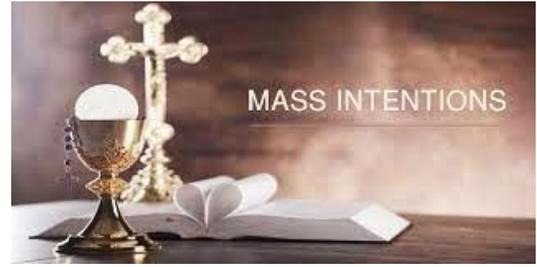


# WHY DO CATHOLICS DO THAT?



## MASS INTENTIONS: Praying for those who have died is a Work of Mercy

(A teaching from Msgr. Charles Pope)

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, but 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).

**Praying for the living is a great and wondrous spiritual work of mercy;** its value is beyond that of gold or pearls. 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 a treasure of inestimable value.

**Perhaps one of the greatest joys of Heaven will be** seeing how much of a difference our prayers made, even the distracted and perfunctory ones. Maybe our simple utterance at the end of a decade of the rosary to “Save us from the fires of Hell” and to “Lead all souls to Heaven” will reach the heart of one lost soul, prompting him to answer the gentle call of God to return. Imagine that in Heaven that very sinner comes up to you and says, “Though we never met, your prayer reached me and God applied His power to me.” Imagine the joy of many such meetings in Heaven. Imagine, too, whom *you* will joyfully thank for their prayers, people you know and some you never met. But they prayed and the power of their prayers reached you.

**While the value of praying for the living is not widely disputed, praying for the dead is a spiritual work of mercy that has suffered in recent decades.** Too many Catholics today “miss a step” when a loved one dies. There are often immediate declarations that the deceased is “in Heaven” or “in a better place.” But Scripture doesn't say that we go right to Heaven when we die. No, indeed. First, there is a brief stopover at the judgment seat of Christ.

**The Letter to the Hebrews says,** *It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment* (Heb 9:27). St. Paul writes, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad* (2 Cor 5:10).

Our deceased loved ones go to the judgment seat of Christ, and *that* is worth praying about!

**What is the judgment for those who lived faithful lives?** In such cases, the judgment is not merely about the ultimate destination of Heaven or Hell. The judgment would seem to be “Is My work in you complete?”



**Indeed, the Lord has made all of us a promise:** *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mat 5:48). Such a beautiful promise! Yet most of us know that we are not in such a state now. If we were to die today it is clear that much work would still be required. Thus when we send our faithful loved ones to judgment, although we send them with hope, we are aware that finishing work may be necessary. Purgation and purification are necessary before entering Heaven, of which scripture says, *Nothing impure will ever enter it* (Rev 21:27).

**Again, this is worth praying about. 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, but there are also sufferings that purgation must cause. St. Paul says of Purgatory, *Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire* (1 Cor 3:13-15). Yes, there is fire, but thank God it is a healing fire. There are tears, too, for Scripture says (regarding the dead) that *Jesus will wipe every tear from their eyes* (Rev 21:4).

**How consoling and merciful our prayers must seem** to our beloved who have died! Our prayers must seem like a gentle wind that speeds them along, onward and upward toward Heaven!

**Praying for the dead, then, is the last and greatest spiritual work of mercy.** By the grace of it, and through its help, souls attain the glory God has prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

## How to offer a Mass Intention at our Parish



Prayer  
Requests

Mass intentions are offered at every Mass celebrated in our parish (*daily, weekends and Holy days*). They are listed in the weekly bulletin. Contact the HCSC rectory office at 202-546-1885 or [hscstaff@hscchurch.org](mailto:hscstaff@hscchurch.org). We will try and accommodate your request for the date you prefer if it is available. You can place as many intentions as you would like. Usually a small donation (\$10) is attached to your request as a way for the one requesting the Mass to share in the Sacrifice of Praise. However, it is a donation, not a fee. Sometimes due to lack of income or other reasons, the monetary donation may not be possible or appropriate and we certainly understand.

**MASS CARDS:** If you are submitting a mass intention, you want to send a Mass card to the family indicating the date/time of the mass. Please request a Mass card when you place your intention with us. We can mail it for you to the family or you can have it mailed to you or you can pick it up from the rectory office. Call the rectory office if you have questions. Thank you.