

## Praying for Our Deceased

Once, a young girl was walking into a church with her mother. Curious, she asked, "Why are we going to church?" Her mother responded, "We're going to pray for Grandma." Grandma had died a couple of weeks earlier, and the young girl had attended the funeral. Everyone had explained to her what death meant, and she seemed to understand that Grandma wasn't coming back.

The girl continued with her questions, "Why should I pray for Grandma? The priest said at the funeral that she is now in a better place." Everyone seemed to agree that this "better place" was heaven, so she wondered why she needed to pray for her if she was already there.

This brings us to a significant theological issue related to our understanding of eschatology—what happens after death. It ties in with our philosophy of time and our beliefs about the afterlife. There are many stages after death: first, the soul separates from the body; then there is an immediate judgment in which the person understands their fate for the final judgment that will occur at the end of the world. At that time, they will receive their glorified body and will ultimately go to heaven or hell. The Christian who believes in the risen Christ, who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, awaits their own glorification with Christ at the time of his glorious second coming (see Colossians 3:1-4).

Since the days of Einstein, we have learned that time is relative. To give a human example: in the United States, people often say, "Give me a second," even though they don't truly mean a second. In contrast, Some might say, "*Uno momento*." No one knows how long that moment will take; it could be a minute, an hour, a day, or even a lifetime. Thus, our perception of time is relative—especially in relation to God. God does not live in time as we do; instead, He lives in the "eternal now". This idea, rooted in the theology of Saint Augustine for Catholics and John Calvin for Protestants, suggests that the past, present, and future exist as a single moment to God. This is why God is unchangeable; He does not exist in "was," "is," and "will be." God simply exists as "is." As Moses learned.

This used to be expressed in saying the God exists outside of time. The Resurrection was a metahistorical event (beyond history.) The moment of creation to God is the same as the moment of the end of the universe, and everything in between exists within that singular moment known as the "eternal now."

This understanding is more prevalent in Western theological thought, and is found in both Catholic and Orthodox theologies regarding God. So, why do we pray for the deceased? Because they have died and are in the process of going to heaven or hell. We often forget that there is another option,

especially when priests try to be kind at funerals, saying they are in a better place. Some family members might believe that this is a miracle.

C.S. Lewis noted that we might be surprised to find three types of people in heaven: first, those we thought were unworthy who unexpectedly made it there; second, those we assumed were holy but clearly were not; and third, ourselves, who might also be surprised if we made it to heaven.

When we pray, we express our love and concern for the deceased. They are able to know that we love them through our prayers. It is also possible that they can pray for us, just as we might ask a saint to intercede for our requests. However, there is no guarantee regarding where they are; our assumptions about their heavenly status might be incorrect. God knows, in the eternal now, where they will ultimately end up, and they may know it, too.

When attending a funeral, it is important to keep in mind that even in this eternal moment, the individual may not have undergone particular judgment. Therefore, it's best to avoid saying that they are in a better place, as this may not be true. Instead, you can always pray that they will find peace in a heavenly existence. Additionally, remember that heaven is not just a physical place; it is a state of being in the presence of God.

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