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2 November 2026 – Commemoration of All Souls

Wisdom 2:1... 3:9; Romans 6:3-9; John 11:17-27

Resurrection of Lazarus

Today's liturgical celebration has a certain monastic flavor, since it was instituted in 998 by Saint Odilon, the fifth abbot of Cluny, and spread throughout the Church in the following centuries. Yesterday's celebration was initially the feast of all the 'martyrs' of the Church, then gradually became that of all the "saints". It may be interesting to note the official name of today's solemnity in the liturgical calendar. It is the 'Memorial (in Latin, *commemoratio*) of all the **faithful** departed'. Of course, we can always pray for all men and women who have died either in the last year or throughout history. But today's liturgy asks us to pray for all the 'faithful' departed, that is, all those who have died with **faith** in Christ.

This 'detail' — and it is more than a detail — is particularly important today, when the Second Vatican Council has accustomed us to seeing the Church as the 'people of believers' and when Pope Francis, in line with Vatican II, constantly spoke to us of what he called the '*faithful people*', that is, the people of all those who have put their faith in Christ Jesus, and whose faith, he repeated, is 'infallible'.

It is precisely this faith in Christ that the Gospel passage we have just heard, taken from the Gospel of John, speaks to us about. We can easily distinguish two levels of writing in this passage. The original narrative was an account of the resurrection of Lazarus, the greatest of the miracles performed by Jesus. When the evangelist John decided to insert this account at the crucial moment in Jesus' life, that is, at the end of his ministry and the beginning of his passion, he transformed it. What is now at the center of the story is no longer the miracle itself, but rather Jesus' dialogue with Martha and her solemn **act of faith**.

At the heart of this dialogue are Jesus' revealing words: '*I am the resurrection and the life*,' and Martha's response (v. 27): '*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.*'

This text also helps us to understand the great richness and diversity of the spiritual experience of the early Church. Each of the local Christian communities had its own way of living and reliving its experience of Christ. In the churches of

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the Matthew tradition, the memory of Jesus' ministry is centered on Jesus' relationship with his group of disciples, especially the twelve apostles. But this memory, in John's Gospel, is centered on Jesus' relationship with a number of friends, especially Martha, Mary and Lazarus. They are his true disciples, and he is their master. Martha is the first to be mentioned. It is she who, after receiving the revelation and expressing her faith in Jesus' word, goes to fetch Mary, just as Andrew and Philip had gone to fetch Peter and Nathanael. As a much-loved 'disciple' of Jesus, it is she who expresses, on behalf of all, the messianic faith of the community. Martha confesses her messianic faith, not in response to a miracle, but in response to Jesus' revelation and his challenge: '*Do you believe this*?' Martha's confession of faith in John's Gospel parallels that of Peter (6:66-71), but it is a Christological confession in a fuller sense. Jesus is the revealer who came from heaven. As such, Martha's confession has the full meaning of Peter's in Caesarea Philippi in the Synoptic Gospels. Thus, Martha represents the full apostolic faith of John's community, just as Peter represents the full apostolic faith of Matthew's community.

Jesus' statement to Martha is in itself quite implausible: 'everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'. It is this statement that gives meaning to our celebration today. We pray for all the deceased "faithful", that is, those who had 'faith' in Christ here on earth. We know that even though they have left the world we know, they are still alive. We also know that they may still be mysteriously deprived of the full enjoyment of God's presence. So we ask Jesus to untie them - to say about them as he said about Lazarus: '*Untie him and let him go*'.

Let us also ask for this grace to be untied from everything that prevents us from living in fullness, from everything that prevents us from believing with the same intensity as Martha and from seeing God's presence in people and events.

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