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Warner Brothers has just released another movie this October. Nothing new about that, but what is interesting is that there is nothing new about its subject - life after death. Odd, isn't it, that a city which wallows in the sybaritic delights of this life is obsessed with the landscapes of the next life. This only demonstrates the enduring truth of human nature that no matter how vigorously man struggles to escape what he is, he cannot escape what he is. Each man possesses a soul and that soul will exist forever. This recognition sticks to a man as permanently as his shadow. Try though he might, it is still there. Upon even the slightest reflection, every man admits that this immortality will not be something like a lifeless fossil or some nondescript stream of cosmic energy. No, no. The soul's immortality is supremely personal. What a man is after death is what a man was during his life. Death does not separate man from his identity, his very self. Death merely removes from his soul some of the activities that he only can execute with his physical body (like smelling a flower, or kissing a friend), but the signature activities of a man endure (understanding and love). Always. It's simply common sense. And as we learned in our college philosophy, this common sense is enshrined in the Principle of Identity, "a thing can only be itself, and not another." In other words, once me, always me.

No wonder Hollywood can't stop making movies about the next life. Like all men of all times, they are haunted by the unavoidable fact that we men live forever. Unlike Hollywood, Catholics have absolutely no trouble admitting this fundamental truth about ourselves. In fact, "saving our souls" is the central preoccupation of our every waking moment. Saving our souls for what? Heaven, of course. Not that Catholics are inattentive to the cares and concerns of this world. Actually, in a kind of paradox, the more we think about heaven the more closely we care about the world and others. Catholics realize that this world is not the world we were made for. All the best about it is only the faintest glimmer of the delights that God has prepared for those who love Him in Heaven.

The Church well understands that God created this world so beautifully and made it so good (Gen. 1:10) that it tends to dazzle us. Man so swoons before this world's loveliness that he tends to forget that an ever more perfect world awaits us. Holy Church finds herself having to pinch us constantly to this fact, like some man who keeps falling asleep. Daily, in fact. She needs to wake us up from the intoxication of this world's wonders, and reopen our eyes upon the unbearable wonders of heaven.

While the Church speaks this truth to us daily, she takes one month of every year to shout it at the top of her lungs for the course of thirty one solid days. Thus, November. Of course, this month is devoted to remembrance of the Holy Souls in Purgatory. Yet as we pray for them, we are recalling the most important truths of this life: death, judgment, Heaven and Hell. Catholic theology calls these truths the Last Things, which clearly they are. But they are truly First Things, in the sense that we ought to always be giving them our first consideration. No act we perform on earth should ever be planned without first discerning how this act, here and now, will affect my life in the hereafter.

So let us pray fervently for these Holy Souls. Principally, by offering Holy Masses for their repose, as well as sacrifices ("offering them up"), rosaries and various other prayers. Those souls are called "holy" because the purgatorial fires are bringing them closer and closer to heaven. Their unique joy lay in the absolute certainty that nothing can prevent them from eventually enjoying heaven. None of us on earth enjoy that certainty. So it is that each day is a struggle against those lurking weaknesses that might ensnare us into sin. But alongside this splendid joy is an undeniable agony - the painful delay suffered before they can see God.

It is in our power to lessen their wait - *dramatically*. Sometimes one Holy Mass or one Hail Mary is just enough for a particular soul to pass into the glories of Paradise. Of course, which souls and how many Masses or prayers are known only to God. Yet, for a Catholic to know that such spiritual power lies in his hands is overwhelming. So we pray, and pray, and pray for those dear Poor Souls. When we pray for their “repose” we must not think we pray for some kind of mummified sleep. “Repose” or “rest” refers to the perfect satisfaction of every possible desire that man could possess. Enjoyment of the Beatific Vision means possessing God Himself. To have God is to have everything, and that is ecstatic. No rest-as-sleep here. Only the eternal thrill of enjoying every delight as we love the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, along with all the saints and angels, forever.

When we weary of the sacrifices that virtue and the love of God require, just think of that.