

The Dead Are in Great Need of Our Help



“With the Saints grant rest, O Christ, to the souls of Thy servants, where there is neither pain, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life unending.”

—Kontakion from the memorial service for the Dead



Produced by

Orthodox Monastery of the Archangel Michael

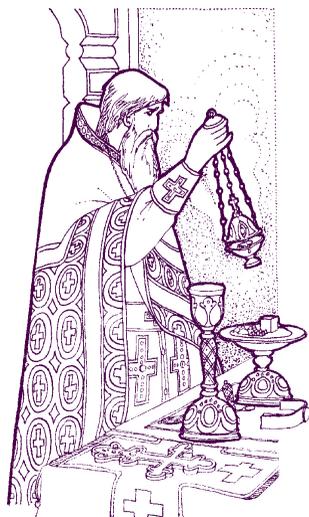
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What Can We Do For The Dead?

by Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco

Every one of us who desires to manifest his love for the dead and give them real help, can do this best of all through prayer for them, and in particular by commemorating them



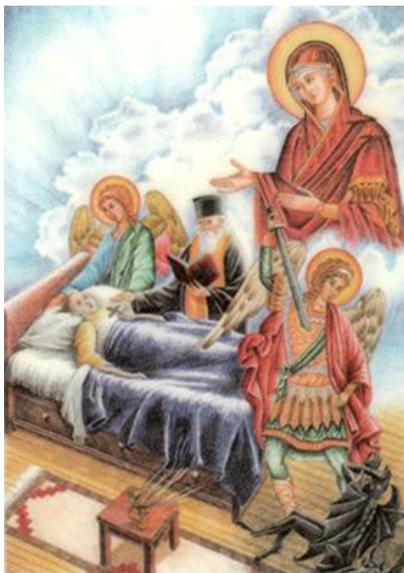
at the Liturgy, when the particles which are cut out for the living and the dead are let fall into the Blood of the Lord with the words: “Wash away, O Lord, the sins of those here commemorated by Thy Precious Blood, by the prayers of Thy saints.”

We can do nothing better or greater for the dead than to pray for them, offering commemoration for them at the Liturgy, of this they are always in need, and especially during those forty days when the soul of the deceased is proceeding on its path to the eternal habitations.

The body feels nothing then: it does not see its close ones who have assembled, does not smell the fragrance of the flowers, does not hear the funeral orations. But the soul senses the prayers offered for it and is grateful to those who make them and is spiritually close to them.

O relatives and close ones of the dead! Do for them what is needful for them and what is within your power. Use your money not for outward adornment of the coffin and grave, but in order to help those in need, in memory of your close ones who have died, for churches, where prayers for them are offered. Show mercy to the dead, take care for their souls. Before us all stands that same path, and how we shall then wish that we would be remembered in prayer! Let us therefore be ourselves merciful to the dead.

As soon as someone has reposed, immediately call or inform a priest, so he can read the “Prayers on the Departure of the Soul,” which are appointed to be read over all Orthodox Christians after death. Try, if it be possible, to have the funeral in church and to have the Psalter read over the deceased until the funeral. The funeral need not be performed elaborately, but most definitely it should be complete, without abbreviations; think at this time not of yourself and your convenience. Each word



The blessed repose of a righteous Christian

of prayer for the reposed is like a drop of water to a thirsty man. Most definitely arrange at once for the serving of the forty-day memorial, that is, daily commemoration at the Liturgy for the course of forty days. Usually, in churches where there are daily services, the deceased whose funerals have been served there are commemorated for forty days and longer. But if the funeral is in a church where there are no daily services, the relatives themselves should take care to order the forty-day memorial wherever there are daily services. It is likewise good to send contributions for commemoration to monasteries, as well as to Jerusalem, where there is constant prayer at the holy places. But the forty-day memorial must be begun immediately after death, when the soul is especially in need of help in prayer, and therefore one should begin commemoration in the nearest place where there are daily services.

Therefore, panikhidas (memorial services for the dead) and prayer at home for the dead are beneficial for them, as

are good deeds done in their memory, such as alms or contributions to the Church. But especially beneficial for them is commemoration at the Divine Liturgy. There have been many appearances of the dead and other occurrences which confirm how beneficial the commemoration of the dead is. Many who died in repentance, but who were unable to manifest this while they were alive, have been freed from tortures and have obtained repose. In the Church, prayers are continually offered for the repose of the dead, and on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, in the kneeling prayers at vespers, there is even a special petition “for those in hell.”

Let us take care for those who have departed into the other world before us, in order to do for them all that we can, remembering that “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

“Deliver, O our Saviour, all who have died in faith from the ever scorching fire, and unilluminated darkness, the gnashing of teeth, and the eternally tormenting worm, and all torment.”

—from the Service of Meat Fare Saturday

*“Give rest, O God, to the souls of Thy servants,
and appoint for them a place in Paradise;
where the choirs of the saints, O Lord, and the
just will shine forth like stars; to Thy servants
that are sleeping now give rest, overlooking all
their offenses.”*

—from the memorial service for the Dead



How Can We Best Honour Our Friends and Relatives Who Have Departed This Life?

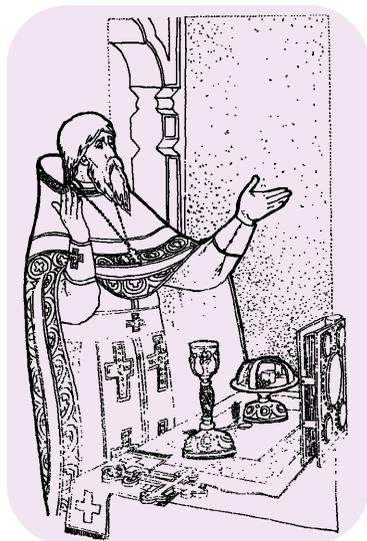
by Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco

We often see relatives of the departed go to great lengths in arranging an elaborate funeral. Substantial sums are not infrequently spent on fancy tombstones. Relatives and friends spend lots of money on wreaths and flowers (even though the latter have to be removed from the coffin before it is closed, so as not to hasten the decomposition of the body).

Some like to pay their respects to the departed and express their condolences by placing a notice in the newspaper, although such a public display reflects the shallowness of their feelings and often their insincerity. One who is truly grieved will not advertise it; a personal expression of sympathy carries more warmth.

Whatever such arrangements we make, the deceased is not going to benefit. For the dead body, it is all the same whether it lies in a plain or a fancy coffin, in a lavish or a humble grave. It does not smell the fragrance of the flowers that are brought; it does not need feigned expressions of sympathy. The body will be given over to decay; the soul lives, but it no longer experiences any feelings through the sensory organs. Another life has begun for the soul, and it has other needs.

Here is what it needs and what we must do if we indeed love the departed and desire to bring him our gifts.



What, in fact, will bring comfort to the soul of the departed?

First of all, sincere prayers on his/her behalf—prayers at home and especially the prayers of the Church, joined with the Bloodless Sacrifice, i.e., commemoration at the Divine Liturgy.

Many appearances of the deceased and other visions attest to the tremendous benefit which the departed receive from prayers on their behalf and from offering the Bodiless Sacrifice in their name.

Another thing that brings them consolation is almsgiving and other charity in their name. To feed a hungry person in the name of the departed, to help an indigent is to do the same for the deceased.

Saint Athanasia (commemorated April 12), before she died, willed that for the forty days after her repose the poor be fed in memory of her. However, the sisters of the convent were lax and did so for only nine days. The Saint then appeared to them in the company of two angels and said, “Why did you forget my will? Know that charity and the prayers of a priest, offered on behalf of a soul through the course of forty days, stir up God’s mercy: if the souls of the departed were sinful, the Lord absolves their sins; if they were righteous, those praying for them are rewarded with virtue.”

Especially nowadays, when it is so difficult for everyone, it is senseless to waste money on useless things when, in spending it on the poor, one can do two



good deeds at once—benefiting the departed and also the recipient of the charity.

Not long ago, on the first-year anniversary of nun Mari's repose, in accordance with her will, donations were collected and a dinner for the needy was prepared on the grounds of the Archbishop's residence. Some 150 people responded to the notice, and all were fed. A great good was thereby accomplished.

Even if one does not do good on such a big scale, if one feeds at least a few or even one hungry person, this is already something.

To do this is not difficult; one has but to give a sum of money for a memorial meal to the committee for Assistance to the Needy at the Archbishop's church, or to the House of Mercy or the soup kitchen.

With prayer for the departed, food will be given to the poor. They will be satisfied physically, and the departed will have their fill spiritually.

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“With the spirits of the righteous made perfect in faith, give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy servants and preserve them in that life of blessedness that is lived with Thee, O Friend of man.”

—from the memorial service for the Dead

Pray for the Reposed!

by the New Hieromartyr John of Riga

The death of people who are close and dear to us is one of the most difficult trials sent to us by the Lord God during this temporary life. There are no tears more bitter than the tears of a mother for the beloved child of her heart who goes to the grave before his/her time. What sorrow can we compare to the sorrow of widows and orphans? Nonetheless, our Lord and Saviour turns to these people, the most unfortunate ones in the eyes of the world, saying respectfully, "Do not weep!" The Apostle Paul commands these sorrowing ones, saying, "Do not sorrow!"

What does all this mean? Of course, it does not mean that we should forget those dear loved ones of ours who



The Holy Apostle Paul

have departed, that we should cast them out of our hearts. No. We should love them after their death just as we loved them in life. However, we should not sorrow over their death. Death does not separate us who are Christians from communion in love with those who are dear to us. The Lord Himself has given us the very grace-filled means needed to have communion with them. The first among these means is prayer. Prayer is the best means for spiritual communion among people who are still alive. The Apostle Paul beseeched the believers to pray continually for him in order that the Lord would grant him strength and power to preach. Likewise, St. Paul prayed for others that the Lord would confirm them in the Faith and in a Christian life. There is no doubt that the prayers of believers strengthened the

Apostle and that his prayers strengthened them.

We find an amazing example of the power and action of mutual prayer in the Acts of the Apostles. While St. Peter was in prison sleeping between two guards, *prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him* (Acts 12:5). What was the result of this prayer? During that very night, the Angel of the Lord appeared in the prison, awoke the sleeping Apostle, and led him out of prison.

“Let us all entreat Christ, performing a memorial today for those dead from the ages that He might deliver from eternal fire those departed in faith and in hope of eternal life.”

—from a Canon of Saint Theodore the Studite for the Departed

The power and action of prayer for the souls of the departed is even greater than prayer for the living. There is no greater comfort than prayer and no greater joy than joy in the Lord for those who are separated from their bodies. It is unjust, as some think, to assume that the needs of our departed brethren are unknown to us. However, this is not true. The spiritual needs of the dead are the same as the spiritual needs of the living. The dead need the mercy and goodness of the Heavenly Father, forgiveness and remission of sins, grace-filled help from God in the fulfilment of all good desires, and the peace and ease of the heart and conscience. These things are most important both for the living and the dead. *Give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy departed servants* is the continual prayer and best intention of our Mother Church for the souls of Her departed. We should also beseech the Lord with this intention for the departed souls of our own loved ones.

It could be that some soul bound himself with earthly attachments, with earthly cares, and could not be free of

them after death. Earthly thoughts about home and cares, about acquiring things, might still tug at this soul, torture him, and not allow him the freedom to strive with heart and soul towards God. We should pray that the Lord will grant rest to such a soul in the quiet harbour of His Kingdom. We should pray that the Lord will destroy and burn up in the fire of His Grace the memory of his earthly cares. We should pray that the Lord will warm this soul with love and with the desire for eternal treasure, that the Lord will give rest to this soul in the sweetest hope of eternal blessedness...

The choir of the saints has found the fountain of life and the door of Paradise. May I also find the way through repentance, I am the sheep that was lost, call me up to Thee, O Saviour, and save me.

—from the memorial service for the Dead

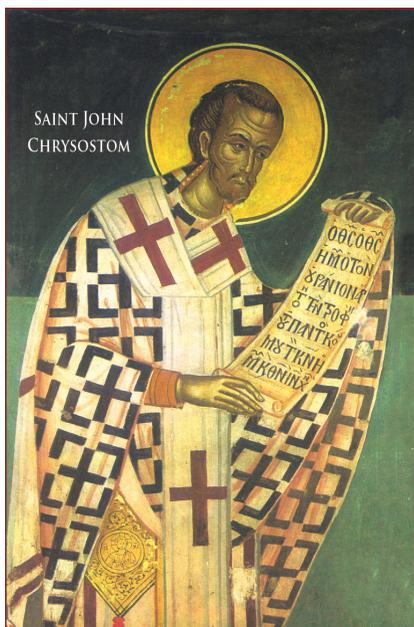
Perhaps, having confessed at the hour of death, some soul did so quickly, in a confused manner. This soul might have forgotten something because of troubled feelings, and he now grieves over this. Perhaps, this soul did not have time to offer God true repentance, to fully cleanse his sins by tears of compunction. Perhaps, the awareness of unconfessed and unforgiven sins tear and torture this soul. Pray for this soul who is suffering. Pray that the Lord God might comfort him with the protection of His inextinguishable mercy. Pray that this soul might receive, albeit at this late hour, remission of sins because of his sincere remorse.

Who can enumerate all those bonds with which our soul might bind itself in this lifetime and by which it might remain bound for eternity. One might have been envious of his neighbour in the depths of one's soul and bound himself thus. Another person might have mocked the weakness of

His neighbour and become according to the words of the Lord, worthy of Hell. Another person might have lied and as a result became the son of the father of lies. *If Thou shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, O Lord, who shall stand?* Therefore, no matter how holy a man's life might be, no one can be sure that he will pass into the next world completely reconciled with God. No man can say that the prayerful intercessions of those brethren who are left alive are unnecessary for him.

Was not the repentance of St. Ephraim the Syrian sincere and deep? Even he, sensing that his end was near, besought his brethren, "O Brothers, accompany me into the world above with prayers, psalms, and offerings. Remember me on the fortieth day after my death; because prayers and offerings made by the living help the departed."

Works of charity are another means of communion with the departed. "If you desire to honour the dead, offer a gift for him. Honour him by good works, charitable offerings, and services" (St. John Chrysostom). Send gifts for the reposed through the hands of the poor and the hopeless. In the name of the reposed, do acts of charity to the best of your ability and be assured that your gift will be received by God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has assured us that our gifts will be received, saying, *In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me* (Matt. 25:40). Can it be that He Who is All-powerful will



remain in debt to us? If you give food and drink to the hungry and the thirsty in His Name, then the Lord will fill the soul of your departed brother with the appearance of His light-bearing and joy-filling Image.

“Deliver, O Saviour, Thy slaves who are in the hell of tears and sighing.”

—from a Canon of Saint Theophan the Branded

It could be that the soul of your relative is ashamed before the holy angels because of his lack of good deeds and because of his wretched sins, and he hides in darkness and in murky depths from the face of God. Clothe the naked; wash the feet of the tired; receive and give rest to the traveller in the name of such a soul; and the merciful Lord will vest this soul in the Garment of His Mercy, will adorn it in the Robe of His justification, will wash its sinful filth in His Most Precious Blood...

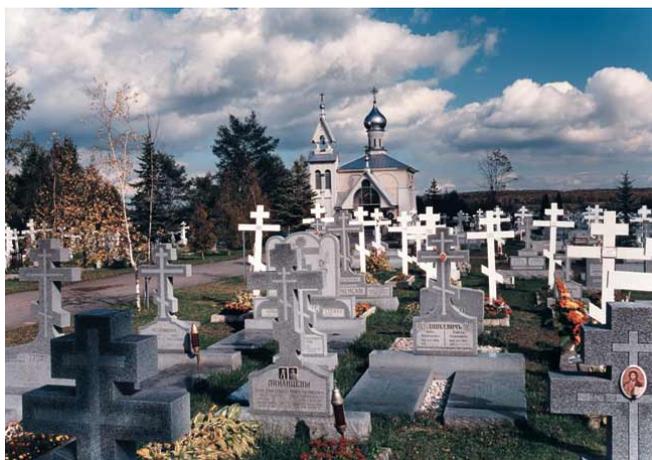
It could be that the soul of your friend bound by sins languishes in a dungeon without the vision of God’s face. Hurry to a prison and assuage the heart of a suffering prisoner in the name of your departed friend. The Lord will send His bright angels to comfort the soul of your sorrowing friend, to strengthen him with hope, and make him rejoice in the promise of God’s mercy.

It could be that a soul has left this world for the spiritual world without having drawn close to the holy inhabitants of that world through prayer; he may have appeared in that higher sphere as one entering a strange and unfamiliar land and may not find any spiritual ‘relative’ in this upper Sion. Take in the stranger; give rest to the beggar; give him a place to rest his head, and the Lord will grant the soul, for whom you do this, one of the bright dwellings in His Father’s mansion. The souls of the righteous will receive this soul in bright and joyful

communion. St. John Chrysostom says, “If we desire to relieve the sufferings of a sinner, let us do acts of mercy in his name. Though he be unworthy, the Lord will comfort and pity him.”

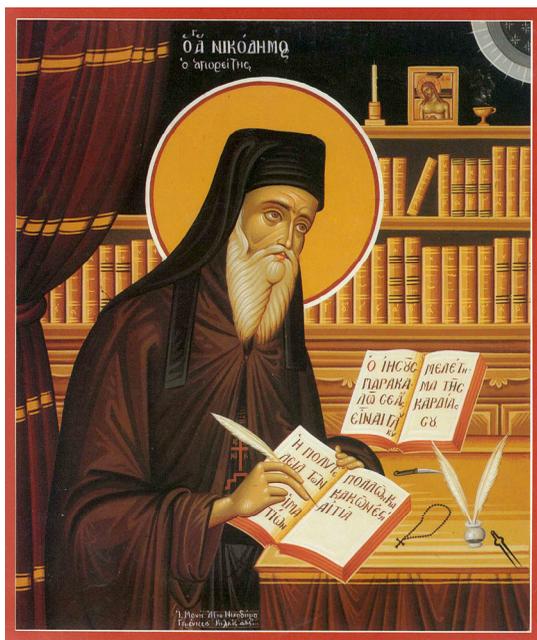
When we pray for the reposed and do charitable works in their name, it is necessary, Brethren, to reflect on our own death while there is still time. We should prepare now so that we will not pass into the future life of torture bound by bonds of sin. No matter how short or how long the Lord has determined that we will live on earth, there is no doubt that our entire present life is a road leading to death and to the threshold of eternity. There is nothing better or of more value for us to acquire than a peaceful, blameless, repentant, and Christian end to our life. He who has lived piously will repose piously. He who has lived with the Lord will die with the Lord. He who zealously serves the Lord before death will be with the Lord after his repose. *Where I am, there shall also My servant be. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*

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Weep for Those in Hades

by Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain



No one can deny that Memorial Services for those who have fallen asleep are mournful and that they bring about sorrow. First, because the Church considers the departed brethren as sinners, and not as righteous, sin being the root and cause of sorrow and mourning because it separates one from God.

Second, because the souls of those who have fallen asleep are considered to be in a dark and distressing place, and simply, in the prison of Hades, which is truly a place of sorrow and a cause for sadness. Wherefore, the Church offers supplication through the Memorial Services that the souls of the departed brethren be liberated from such a place and be placed in a place of light, a place of green pasture, a place of refreshment, wherein there is no sorrow and sighing. It is for this reason that all the living Christians who are present at the Memorial Services for the deceased wear mournful clothes, their eyes are sorrowful and filled with tears, and they supplicate and beseech the Holy God on behalf of the one fallen asleep with a grievous voice, saying: “Lord have mercy. Lord, grant rest to the soul of Thy servant.”

Third and finally, Memorial Services are mournful on account of their reference to death, the source of every sorrow and mourning. And if Paul says that we should not grieve over those who have fallen asleep (1 Th. 4:13), here, “those who have fallen asleep,” does not refer to sinners (as those for whom we hold Memorial Services are considered to be), but it refers to the Righteous and to the Saints, as is evident by his words which follow, and as Chrysostom and Theophylact interpret this passage.



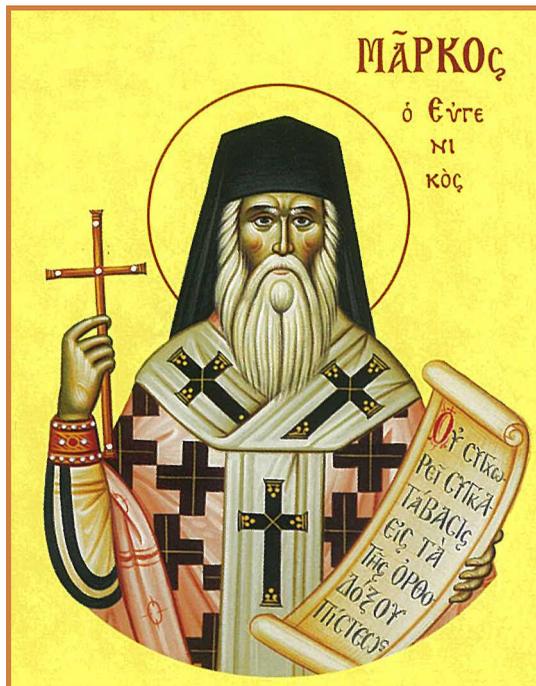
Those who have sinned forgivably and moderately hope to gain freedom through the unspeakable mercy of God. For on behalf of such souls, that is of the moderately and forgivably sinful, there are in the Church's prayers, supplications, liturgies, as well as memorial services and almsgiving, that those souls may receive favour and comfort. Thus when the Church prays for the souls of those who are lying asleep, we hope that there will be comfort for them from God, but not through fire and purgatory, but through Divine love for mankind, whereby the infinite goodness of God is seen.

—Council of 1722 in Constantinople

Those in Hades Await Help for Their Release

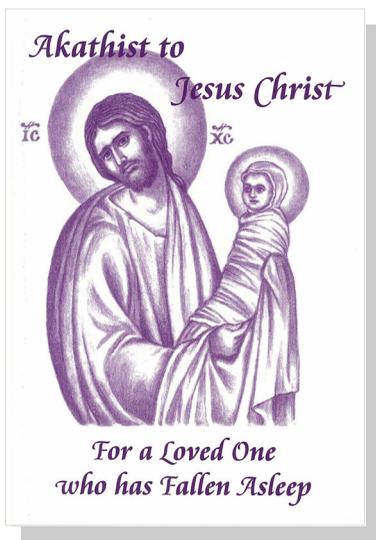
by Saint Mark of Ephesus

The sinners and those imprisoned after death in Hades benefit from these prayers [for the reposed] on the one hand because they have not been definitively condemned and do not yet have the final decision of the tribunal, on the other hand because they have not yet fallen into hell, which will happen after the Second Coming of Christ. If this is effective for sinners, much more do the memorial services and prayers benefit those who have repented but did not have time to be purified completely and therefore illuminated. If these have very small or light sins, they are restored to the inheritance of the righteous or remain where they are, that is to say in Hades, and “their troubles are lightened and they return towards more honourable hopes.”



Highly Recommended

Akathist to the Lord for a Loved One Who Has Fallen Asleep



Anyone who is grieving at the loss of a loved one will truly find comfort in praying this Akathist. The Church teaches us that prayers for the departed are of great value, not only for the soul that has left this world, but also for the grieving. This Akathist is to be said for a particular soul and is a prayer that that soul be received into Christ's Heavenly Kingdom.

*Produced by
St Paisius Serbian Orthodox Monastery
PO Box 1075, Safford, Arizona 85548 USA
www.stpaisiusmonastery.org*

This Monastery has produced an excellent range of Akathists that are highly recommended.

“In the place of Thy rest, O Lord, where all Thy saints repose, give rest also to the souls of Thy servants for Thou alone art immortal.”

—from the memorial service for the Dead



Saint Sisoës the Great of Egypt

Commemorated July 9

Saint Sisoës, looking at the bones of the once-glorious and powerful Alexander the Great, was amazed by the passing of time and the vanity of this world. He cried out in fear: “No one can escape death and God’s judgment!”