

## All Souls

**Grief is an uncontrollable emotion. When a family member dies, the members of the same family all grieve in different ways, and individuals grieve differently from day to day—or from hour to hour. A counselor friend of mine once said grief is a roller coaster, and it really is in charge. All you can do is ride it out. The grief will come to an end, but only on its own terms. You can help yourself by restoring routine and order to your life.**

**The Catholic Church has centuries of experience helping people through their grief, and our funeral rites have evolved accordingly. When I've lost someone dear to me, I've always found comfort in the funeral Mass. It provides order and routine where there is chaos. A funeral addresses the needs of grief at a particular time and circumstance, and it brings the assurance of tradition. The funeral Mass declares something like this: "I know that your loss is personal and deep. But you're not the first one to go through this. Others have too, and not just in this generation, but in every generation past. So take these prayers, take these scriptures, take these symbols. They will ease your loss today."**

**The pandemic has taken away our health, our freedoms, our community, our safety, our travel, our celebrations, our entertainments and our peace. It has also taken lives. It has taken away the means of our grief, the Catholic funeral Mass. For many families, that has made the loss more acute. They were unable to witness the gathering of friends showing respect for the deceased, to feel the embraces of those who care, even to go to a church, the building that provides a vision for life after death. The virus has intensified grief.**

**The first Christians blazed this path for us. They had no prior traditions behind funeral rites of their own. They expected Jesus to return before they died, but now their friends were dying. So they reached out to a person who could guide them through a time of darkness: the apostle, Saint Paul. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul laid out a vision of comfort. He wrote to people who had been baptized in a stream or a pool of water, immersing themselves completely, only to rise up again. Paul compares this going down and coming up to dying and rising. He writes, "We who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."**

**Each year we hear that same passage at the Easter Vigil. Well, each year except this year, when the virus took the Vigil away from many people as well. But as Paul says in another place, no one can put a chain on the Word of God. It will be free in every age, in every crisis, and in every joy.**

**We gather this All Souls Day to pray for the dead, and to hear words of comfort. Jesus promises eternal life to those who are baptized, and to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood. The pandemic has intensified our grief, but it cannot take away the word of the Lord. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him." And for those who believe, the pandemic has no power over us.**