

All Saints and Souls: glossary needed

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A philosopher classmate once told me that the aboriginal Florida Indians did not see Christopher Columbus approaching their shores because they did not have a word for ship. In my years as a high school teacher, my students' faces told me when they understood words like humility, infatuation or chastity.

Each field of human interaction uses both a general vocabulary and words specific to them. If we don't like the particular activity, we might call such vocabulary "jargon." If we are on an airplane with 200 other people, we are reassured by the pilot and air traffic control using a common language, even if it is not one we understand. If hunters, fishers, painters and composers can have particular vocabularies, Catholics are not any different for having our own.

For the purposes of this column, let me ask you to consider our Masses and cemetery prayers for Nov. 1 and 2 as refresher courses in faith and catechetics. The words holiness, saint, salvation, heaven, communion of saints, and souls have specific content. They remind us that when God became human in Jesus, God was telling us of the dignity and power of human existence. Too often we forget that our faith is not just about going out of the body into eternity, but that the present bodily life is itself a sacred space. When we understand who we are, we have a framework for how we should behave. As theologians will say, our anthropology directs our morality.

The Eucharistic Liturgy, or Divine Worship (yes, it's OK to say "Mass") pulls us back into a reverence for our bodily, historical selves. How? By reminding us that Christ is present "body and blood, soul and divinity" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1374).

In faith, Jesus' body and our own are not of secondary importance. This is why the Incarnation of Christ is itself a dazzling revelation, even before the young Jesus uttered his first word to Mary and Joseph. This contributes to our understanding about the "real presence" of Christ at Mass or at adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He remains close to us, among us. Those who participate at Mass on the first two days of November may hear other words that may not be immediately understood. But they offer windows into the mystery of how God ties us and creation together. Words like: (Nov. 1) venerate, intercessor, reconciliation, immortality; (Nov. 2) resurrection, paschal, mortality, salvation, angels and archangels.

When the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition* (the green one) was published, American bishops added a glossary at the rear. This is true for the print and online versions. A glossary combines a word's meaning with how it is used. Most of the special words found in this column can be referenced in this section. As a teacher, I think that this glossary alone is worth the price of the book.

Our present moment has its difficulties. So it is encouraging that certain words help us to see God's works as having a divine origin. Evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit is traditionally described by 12 words known as fruits of the Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity (Galatians 5:22-23).

It is important that we are able to see God when God approaches us.