

Praying for the dead for Catholics it is part and parcel of the faith tradition, rooted in Old Testament readings and supported by the Catechism and the Church's funeral liturgy.

The clearest Bible reference about prayers for the dead is from the Second Book of Maccabees. When soldiers were preparing the bodies of their slain comrades for burial they discovered they were wearing amulets taken from a pagan temple which violated the law of Deuteronomy so they prayed that God would forgive the sin these men had committed.

The New Testament echoes this notion in the second letter of Timothy when Paul prays for someone who died named Onesiphorus, saying: "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also has something to say about prayers for the dead, stating: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (1030).

The Roman catacombs where early Christians were buried also were places of prayer.

The highest form of prayer we offer for the dead is the Mass. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' state that the funeral mass is the "central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased." The bishops point out that "the funeral liturgy is an act of worship, and not merely an expression of grief." (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' overview of Catholic funeral rites.)

The Funeral Mass is a time when the Church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery.

During November we remember in a special way all those who have died, our own loved ones and those who have no one to pray for them. In November we reflect and respond to the call of Scripture; "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead." (2 Maccabees 12:46)

Eternal rest grant unto them Oh Lord and let Perpetual Light shine upon them. Amen.