

Offering Mass for the Intention of the Faithful Departed



As Catholics, we can prescribe our prayers or promise it for specific intentions, like "I will pray for your health, or your intention". When the Church or her ministers offer for the repose of the souls of the faithful departed, we call them suffrages. These are the Masses, prayers, or other acts of piety.

We hear stories of people who have been healed in body and we are in awe!

We seldom consider how much Jesus does to heal souls suffering on earth and more so the souls suffering in Purgatory. A place which none of us has seen and to which many of us could go. We are invited to act on what the Saints are telling us!

Christ told St. Faustina, "All these souls are greatly loved by Me. They are making retribution to My justice. It is in your power to bring relief. Draw all the indulgences from the treasury of My Church and offer them on their behalf. Oh, if you only knew the torments they suffer."

We do not stop to think about the physical and spiritual healing through the Eucharist. Today, many are discovering how the Eucharist for the deceased also heals the living as they come into deeper relationship with Jesus. Dr. Kenneth McCall has over one thousand cases of emotional or physical healing occurring with clients by offering a Mass for their deceased loved ones. The Mass heals the living and the dead!

The power of prayer is grabbing the headlines. The *Arizona Journal* reports that "intercessory prayer" produced measurable improvement in the medical outcome of critically ill patients. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the highest act of worship and the highest form of *prayer*. St. John Chrysostom says, "Christ is the victim that gives solace to the dead".... The Council of Trent tells us, "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Perpetual Sacrifice, is the greatest of all suffrages for the Holy Souls."

<https://www.sign.org/articles/gregorian-masses-offered>

The Gregorian Masses - 30 Masses for one soul in Purgatory

The Church has declared that the confidence of the faithful in the special efficacy of the Gregorian Masses is pious and reasonable (Sacred Congregation for Indulgences, August 24, 1888). More than one series of Gregorian Masses may be offered, but not for more than one person at a time. Also the special fruits of these Masses apply only to the deceased. But the Masses need not be said by the same priest or at the same altar.

The history of the "Thirty Mass" practice goes back to the year 590 AD in St. Andrew's Monastery in Rome, founded by St. Gregory the Great in his own family home around 570.

After his election as Pope in 590, one of the monks, Justus by name, became ill. So he admitted to a lay friend, Copiosus, that he had hidden three gold pieces among his medications years before, when he was professed a monk. Both, in fact, were former physicians. And sure enough, the other monks found the gold when seeking the medication for Justus.

The Founder monk, now Pope Gregory, hearing of this scandalous sin against Holy Poverty, called in the Abbot of his beloved monastery, and ordered the penalty of solitary confinement for Justus, even though he was dying, and ordered his burial not in the cemetery but in the garbage dump. Copiosus told his wretched friend of this decision. Moreover, the communities were to recite over his dreadful grave the words of St. Peter to Simon the Magician: "May thy money perish with thee" (Acts 8:20).

The Pope's desired result was achieved: Justus made a serious repentance, and all the monks a serious examination of conscience. Justus then died, but the matter did not, for thirty days later Pope Gregory returned to the monastery filled with concern for Justus, who would now be suffering the grim temporal punishment of Purgatory's fire for his sins. "We must," said Gregory to the Abbot, "come by charity to his aid, and as far as possible help him to escape this chastisement. Go and arrange Thirty Masses for his soul, so that for thirty consecutive days the Saving Victim is immolated for him without fail." And so it was done.

Some days later, Justus appeared in a vision to his friend Copiosus and said, "I have just received the Communion pardon and release from Purgatory because of the Masses said for me." The monks did a calculation, and noted that it was exactly thirty days since the Thirty Masses had begun for Justus. They shared this great consolation with each other, with their Abbott and with Pope Gregory, whose personal authority guarantees its truth, for he wrote the full account of it in his *Book of Dialogues*, which became very popular.

An approved tradition, but not an official one

Is, then the practice of the Thirty Gregorian Masses officially guaranteed by the Church to rescue the given soul from Purgatory into Heaven? As far as I know, no, they are not officially guaranteed, because although we have here a practice approved by the Church, it is not an institution in which the Church engages her official authority. The case of Justus is a consoling story, but it depends on a vision to Copiosus, which is in the category of private revelation, worthy of our trust perhaps, but not equal to a vision to St. Joseph from Gabriel, for instance.

Nevertheless, along with Copiosus, a goodhearted Catholic physician, we also have St. Gregory the Great acting a striking scene out of his powerful, blessed and awe-inspiring role in the Holy Church. He has helped to consolidate the Catholic habit of prayers for the departed. For centuries after his death, the Gregorian Thirty seems to have been widely observed in Benedictine monasteries. A monk of Cluny (d. 1093) records this fact, and only the "big five" days are allowed to interrupt the thirty: These are Christmas, Easter, and the Holy Week Triduum.

The 30 Gregorian Masses - by Fr. Stephen Somerville

