

Art of the Month: November



Catholics worth their salt know that this is the Month of the Holy Souls. In Sonnet LXXIII, William Shakespeare was not imagining some future event but, although only about 36 at the time of writing, he was aware of the onset of age, the autumn of his years, and he would die at the age of 52. In Sonnet 73, the Bard reflects an awareness that death comes to us all.

"When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang" - just as surely as the fading leaves are blown away and decay, so will come the day when we "must leave ere long." We may think of November as the time when we "shake against the cold," but rather we should think of it as the particular month when we pray and offer sacrifices for the Poor Souls in Purgatory. The name purgatory is derived from the Latin verb 'purgare,' meaning to purify or to cleanse. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, purgatory may best be thought of as a process, or state of purification. In our honest moments we know that while we may be in a state of grace and

free of mortal sins, we are guilty of venial sins or we perhaps have failed to do full penance for sins already forgiven. Purgatory is God's gift to us where we are purified of any attachment even to venial sin. Following death, and after being prepared for Heaven in Purgatory, purified souls will enjoy the fullness of the Beatific Vision. For that reason, I have not chosen a frightening or horrific work depicting Purgatory but of Jesus who loves us as a father loves his children and who welcomes us in His name, wishing us to be with Him in Heaven. This painting dates from 1923 and is the work of Juliaan de Vriedt who lived in Belgium. The children gather around a loving Jesus intent on his tender words. The adults are pushing their children forward as pilgrims do nowadays in the presence of the Pope. There is such joy and happiness. They have passed through the harsh desert pictured in the top left-hand side of the painting and are with the Lord who sits in front of the fruitful vine.

Monsignor Monaghan