***Our Brothers and Sisters***

*Southern Nebraska Register*

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*Most Reverend James Conley*

On Saturday, November 1st, the Church universal will celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. On this day, we celebrate the whole Church Triumphant, the body of believers who enjoy the beatific vision of the Blessed Trinity, for all eternity.

In the Jubilee Year 2000, St. John Paul II pointed out that on November 1st, we celebrate not only the saints who are well known and well loved, “*but also the anonymous saints known only to Him. Mothers and fathers of families, who in their daily devotion to their children made an effective contribution to the Church’s growth and to the building of society; priests, sisters and lay people who, like candles lit before the altar of the Lord, were consumed in offering material and spiritual aid to their neighbor in need; men and women missionaries, who left everything to bring the Gospel message to every part of the world. And the list could go on.”*

The next day, November 2nd, we remember all of our beloved deceased, on All Souls’ Day—the commemoration of the faithful departed. We pray for the Holy Souls in purgatory—for those we know and those we don’t know—and we pray that they will soon rejoice in heaven for all eternity.

Death does not diminish our Christian unity. The Body of Christ is stronger than death.  And so we remain connected and in communion—as brothers and sisters in Christ—even beyond our deaths.  Our unity does not cease, our relationships do not end, and our responsibilities for one another do not come to a close.

The saints in heaven are connected to us in the Body of Christ—they are our brothers and sisters, our elder siblings who have gone before us.  They intercede for us.  Yes, their earthly lives are over, but their earthly relationships have not ended.  And so they have an obligation to pray for us as we pray for holiness in Christ.

The holy souls in purgatory are also connected to us in Jesus Christ. They, too, are our brothers and sisters. And so we have an obligation to intercede for them as they are purified during their journey into eternity.

The feast days of All Saints and All Souls are reminders of the unity in the Body of Christ. And they are reminders of the obligations we have to one another and our obligations to the common good.  All members of the Body of Christ pray for one another because we are obliged to support one other, to build up one another, and because we all want to see a “civilization of love” across the world.

November 4th, two days after these great celebrations, is Election Day in Nebraska.  And Election Day is also a reminder of our obligation to one another—our obligation to support the common good, and to build a civilization of love.

Sadly, many Catholics in our state do not vote on Election Day. I don’t understand why. I have never missed voting in an election ever since I reached voting age. Even during my 12 years of living in Rome, I never missed voting in an election year through an absentee ballot.

Voting is a means of expressing our hopes for our communities, a means of pursuing justice, and of building a culture of life. Voting is a means to help protect the unborn, the family, the poor, and the freedom of conscience and faith in public life. Voting is a civic duty.  It seems to me that not voting, unless there are very grave reasons to abstain, is a sin—and when we fail to vote for reasons no better than apathy or forgetfulness, we ought to confess that.

Whenever possible, Catholics have an obligation to vote—particularly when critical issues are at stake.  Today, in our country, critical issues are certainly at stake.

Abortion remains our national shame.  Our failure to protect the unborn is a failure of the highest magnitude. The right to life is the foundational human right.

Religious people are being systematically marginalized in public life, in business, and in schools.  The sanctity of marriage as we have always known it is being undermined. The family, and the right of children to have mothers and fathers, is under attack.  And the dignity of the poor, whom we are called to love zealously, is often undermined by policy initiatives and greed.

We are connected to every single member of our community—living or dead.  We ought to pray for them.  And we ought to do all that we can to build a culture of justice, of liberty, and a culture of life.