

DEAD, PRAYER FOR THE

The Coptic church, which believes in one final, decisive day of judgment, does not recognize the concepts of purgatory or of a particular [judgment](#) to each individual soul at its separation from the body at the time of death. This attitude is supported by Christ's description of the second coming of the Son of Man, and also by the intrinsic significance of His parables of the kingdom of heaven. Thus, as the souls of the departed await [the resurrection](#) of the dead for judgment, prayers and intercessions may be offered on their behalf, both by individuals and by the church as a whole.

In the evening service of the raising of incense, the prayers for the dead, known as intercessions for the dormant, are recited by the priest, with the response from the deacon and the congregation.

Similar intercessions are mentioned at the following significant points in the course of the celebration of [Divine](#) Liturgy: the offertory, the mystery of the Gospel, the diptych, the prayers preceding and following the fraction, in the prayer of absolution to the Father.

These prayers were prescribed among other practices of the early church. The APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS, referring to cemeteries or burial places as "dormitories," laid down this command: ". . . assemble in the dormitories, [reading](#) the Holy Books, and singing for the martyrs which are fallen asleep, and for all the saints from the beginning of the world, and for your brethren that are asleep in the Lord, and offer the acceptable Eucharist . . . both in your churches and in the dormitories."

Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220), the earliest of the fathers who mentioned the prayers of the dead in their writings, describes their departure as the birthday into a new stage of life: "We offer sacrifices for the dead on their birthday anniversaries."

Reference to these prayers was also made by CYRIL OF JERUSALEM (c. 315-386), in his *Catechetical Lectures*: “After the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless service is completed, over that [sacrifice](#) of propitiation we entreat God for the common peace of the Churches, . . . we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us; . . . and in a word of all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great benefit to the souls, for whom the supplication is put up, while that holy and most awful sacrifice is set forth.”

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