

## Giving Thanks for All the Saints - November 1st

I want to reflect on a passage of scripture, not in our readings today, but often associated with All Saints Day. From Hebrews chapter 12 vs. 1 & 2, first in the King James Version, and then in the NRSV.

*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,*

This verse conjures up a painting in my mind and I'm not sure if it is from my imagination, or I actually saw it, perhaps on a ceiling in the Vatican.

The centre is open sky and around the edges are clouds, over which "all the saints" from past generations peer over - watching over us.

Who are these "saints"? From our reading in Revelation we are told...

*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,*

Some might find that creepy. I find it comforting.

This great crowd of saints....surrounding us....

And today we remember them

We recall their names and prayerfully give thanks for the ways in which their lives proclaimed the love of God. We recall the ways in which they lived that filled our lives with love, hope and peace. We pause to reflect on what they taught us about being truly human in the manner of Christ.

But the saints are not simply a sweet memory of the past. They are a living reality today, in that great mystery of life beyond this life. And sometimes, they visit us.

One of the many great things about being a priest, is that people share their stories with me, stories they won't tell anyone else. And because I have heard so many of these stories, so similar in nature, and have experienced them myself - I truly believe there are moments when the veil between this world and the next is so thin, we touch that reality, and that is meant for our edification and strengthening.

I think of the widow who told me about how her deceased husband comes, once in a while and places his hand on her leg as she falls asleep.

The daughter, whose mother's funeral I presided at, shared her experience of her mother present to her while gardening not long afterward.

And the angry and bereaved widower whose partner came to him in a dream, standing by a beautiful lake to tell him she was well. When I met him as a chaplain two years later, he needed to hear that someone believed that to be a true story - a visitation. It gave him peace.

Whether it is a memory or a visitation of some sort, we are reminded of these past saints not to simply indulge our affection for them, or to languish in our grief, but to reflect upon what they taught us so that we might...

*run with perseverance the race that is set before us*

So pause today, this week and think about....

Who instilled within you the stories of God and Jesus that you've drawn upon your whole life, even when you've questioned them?

Who taught you how to pray? So that when a moment of crisis comes, you find yourself almost automatically turning to God.

Which friend or neighbour, by dropping off food when faced with a challenging time reminded you very practically of God's love for you? And when you remember this, you actually feel the warmth of that love.

Those who lived real, flawed lives of faith, like we do - attending the altar, cleaning the grounds, donating from their sometimes meagre income to support this church and preserve it for us, teaching their grandchildren how to pray, providing food and clothing to neighbours in need, praying in the quiet of their home unbeknownst to any other person. These are the saints surrounding us.

The Joan Cudlips and Don Proutts and Tom Midgleys, to name three recently made alive in the new life. Our spouses, and grandparents, our children and friends. The Mother Theresa's and the Ruth Bader Ginsburg's. The Ghandi's and the Martin Luther King Jr's.

Surrounded we are, by such a great cloud of witnesses.

And by their attention, prayer and hearts we are strengthened for the very difficult race of life. Reminded that there are those who have gone before us and "made it", as we will too. This puts our present suffering and challenges into perspective - neither denying them, nor embellishing them. We are reminded that we are a part of a greater story than just ours and that the point of that story is the love of God being realized in this world and the next.