

Church of the Crossroads
The Festival of All Saints
November 5, 2006
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REFLECTIONS FOR THE FESTIVAL OF ALL SAINTS

To be a saint one has to have died. The rest of us may be saints in the making but the saints whose lives we remember this day are human beings who have made the journey through death to life beyond this life. Metaphorically speaking, they have reached that new heaven and new earth promised by God, that place where all tears will be wiped from all eyes and death shall be no more.

A saint is not always remembered by the living. Ordinary saints who do not have a day named for them are forgotten as time passes. Even so, God always and forever remembers them. They have found their home in the eternal memory of God.

In the Gospel reading for today, Lazarus represents all who have died; he is “every person.” His name means “God assists.” The Christian community has numbered him among the saints, and he is often remembered on this day. Jesus called Lazarus forth from death, and today we have called our loved ones forth from their eternal home to be living and present among us today.

All of us are a mixture of saint and sinner. Therefore, to be a saint one has to be remembered not as a perfect human being but as a human being whose life had value and meaning. After one has died, we remember his or her full humanity, the good and not so good of it, but with the passage of time, the saintly part of a human being shines forth. We forget the sinner and remember the saint.

Recalling the time when ladies eligible for courtship used to drop handkerchiefs in order to attract suitors, Frederich Buechner writes, “In his holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints.”

On this Sunday, as we remember the saints, they become present with us. In our remembering, they are “membered” in us. They become part of us once again.

On All Saints Sunday we celebrate the seamless web of the living and the dead. We are reminded that the living and the dead are held together in the eternal love of God.

All Saints Sunday is about “Being With.” It is about relationships: our relationship with those who have gone before us and their relationship with us; our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us; our relationship with one another.

How glad we are that we have memorial niches in our sanctuary. How good it is that we have this constant reminder that the saints, not just those whose names are carved on the panels, but those whose names are written upon our hearts, are with us in spirit, worshiping with us, strengthening us for the living of our days.

The saints come to our aid in the dry and desert places of our lives. They surround us and encourage us. The Wisdom of Solomon declares: “In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, they will run like sparks through the stubble.” Shining forth, they guide us on our way. How can they not help but encourage us in our own living and dying? After all, they have passed through death. They have been brought to the waters of life. They are in God’s sure keeping.

All Saints Day, then, is a day for remembering. It is a day for solace. It is a day for encouragement and for renewal. It is a day for metaphor and for poetry, and I share with you now the poetry of Maya Angelou.

*When great souls die,
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.
We breathe, briefly.
Our eyes, briefly,
see with
a hurtful clarity.
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid, promised walks never taken . . .*

*And when great souls die,
after a period peace blooms,
slowly and always
irregularly. Spaces fill
with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.
They existed.
We can be. Be and be
Better. For they existed.*

My friends, the saints speak to us this day. “Do not fear. God is your refuge and strength. Do not give up on the pursuit of peace and justice. Do not abandon hope. Continue your journey in faith. In the end, all will be well. All will be well. All will be well.”

“Thanks be to God for all the saints.”