

The **Festival** of All Saints
November 4, 2007
Church of the Crossroads

The Truly Great

*I think continually of those who were truly great,
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the Spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.*

*What is precious is never to forget
The essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.
Never to deny its pleasure in the morning simple light
Nor its grave evening demand for love.
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of the Spirit.*

*Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.
Born of the sun, they traveled a short while towards the sun
And left the vivid air signed with the honour.*

—Stephen Spender

Today, we remember those who were “truly great,” hoping that we may walk in their footsteps. The truly great are not to be confused with the famous. The persons we now have in mind are not those mentioned in history books, although a Desmond Tutu or a Queen Lili‘uokalani will surely bear the marks of the truly great. Today, we remember not only those who we can “Google” but also those ordinary saints who were extraordinary in so many ways. This day, being the Festival of *All Saints*, is a day set aside especially for them. We remember them as lovely human beings, whose lives told of the Spirit “clothed from head to foot in song,” as the poem says. We remember those whom we knew and loved: mothers, fathers, grandparents, husbands, wives, partners, brothers, sisters, children, who, in their many and varied ways, were reflections of the Spirit. They were not perfect human beings (a perfect human being is an oxymoron), but they were authentic human beings, and so we remember them. We want our blood connected with theirs, our lives with their lives.

We remember the saints of this community of faith who were so dear and precious to us. Betty Suenaga, who, long before it was “cool” to do so, composed her yard cuttings and caught the rain from her roof and her laundry, to water her plants. Ah Yin Thom, who, in her nineties, still had a twinkle in her eye and still enjoyed “a good party.” Esther Ho, who single-handedly marched into City Hall and demanded that a traffic light be installed at the corner of Varsity Circle and University Avenue. David Grossmann, who taught us that we have this treasure of life in earthen vessels, and who lived his short life fully and completely. Daisy Akahoshi, who, on her deathbed, waved her living will at her doctors, refusing to be kept alive by means of medicines administered through intravenous tubes. Kenneth Miyoshi, who lived a life of non-violence and who was so very present to everyone who crossed his path. Lovely and gentle John Rantala, godsend to Judy. Don Fox, loving physician to the very young, and lover of all things beautiful. Adelaide Kimura and Yasu Watada and Katherine Lind and Bernice Young and Elsie Ho and so many others. We could go on and on.

These were the truly great, and they remind us that we must never forget the “essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs” that also courses through our veins. We must never “deny its pleasure in the simple morning light / nor its grave evening demand for love.” As evidenced in the lives of the truly great we can never “allow the traffic to smother / with noise and fog, the flowering of the spirit.”

For our spirits do need to flower, and our remembering the truly great can indeed encourage the flowering of our own spirits, causing us to center our lives on things that are essential and important and good, things that Jesus taught us, like standing up for peace and justice, even if there is a cost involved, and loving our enemies, and doing to others as we would have them do to us.

Recalling Glenda Wildschut's teaching about the African concept of *ubuntu*, we can say that because they were, we are, and because we are, those who come after us can be.

What a good thing it is to give thanks this day for the truly great, the ordinary, extraordinary human beings who by their living, their commitment to life, prepared the way for us. May their presence surround us always.

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