

“Clouds of Saints”

I was raised in a non-liturgical tradition. For us the only holy days were Christmas and Easter. So when I came to the Episcopal Church the observance of holy days such as All Saints' Day was new and curious for me. Who were these saints we were remembering?

As I learned a little, I came to know the great saints of church history. Saints like Augustine, Francis, Clare, Patrick, and the many Teresas, Catherines, and Johns. As I got more comfortable with them I could even include the St. Mary (quite a leap for a Baptist boy). But as I learned more about All Saints' Day I learned that the saints are not limited to a few very special, impossibly righteous, unbelievably pious men and women. Saints could be everyday people.

Indeed, in the early church all those who professed the faith and sought, in the words of the prophet Micah, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” were called saints. All of a sudden being a saint was not so exalted. After all, I want to be just, kind, and humble. Perhaps being a saint was possible for anyone, even me.

In the Episcopal Church All Saints' Day is a day for remembering those who have died, especially those who have died during the past year. We come together on November 1<sup>st</sup> to lovingly remember them with prayers, songs, by lighting a candle and speaking their name.

But in my heart I do not limit my All Saints' Day remembrance to just the few who have died in the last year. For me it is the remembrance of the cloud of witnesses that has gone before me. I remember the celebrated saints but even moreso I remember the faithful people whose witness surrounds me each day.

There is something really amazing about that description—“a cloud of witnesses.” Being among the cloud of witnesses feels like being in a meadow at daybreak where the early morning mists swirl about me. I am enveloped in the cloud, and even touched by it as the drops of water condense on me. I become a part of the cloud. The cloud of witnesses also swirls around me, and welcomes me into it. Yet, there is something unusual about this cloud of witnesses which makes it different from other clouds.

When I am in the misty meadow I can see only a few feet in any direction. Unlike that cloud, the cloud of witnesses does not obscure my view. The cloud of the witnesses helps to make my view clearer. Within this cloud I see the Holy more clearly and distinctly as the everyday worries, pains, desires, and distractions are eclipsed. It is the paradox that the Cloud of Witnesses makes life appear new and bright and clear.

On All Saints' Day I celebrate the lives of my cousins Nancy and Peggy, my dad, my grandparents, my uncles and aunts, my friends, and all the others who have gone before me and surround me now. I give thanks for their ongoing witness; for they are truly saints of God.