

All Saints Day A, 2017
Church of the Holy Trinity

Whenever I think about all the saints, I think about a beautiful church I once visited in Ravenna, Italy. Ravenna is noted for its spectacular Byzantine mosaics, and Sant'Apollinare Nuovo was built between the end of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century. When you enter the church, you feel as though you are joining a procession. Figures of the saints—men on one side and women on the other—are pictured walking in a long line towards the figures of Jesus and Mary. They are all robed in white, surrounded by palm trees, and they carry crowns which symbolize their heavenly reward. They are the great multitude spoken of in Revelation. The “elders”—the Apostles—look on from above. The angels stand around the thrones on which Jesus and Mary are seated. It is a beautiful and inspiring depiction of heaven.

In Los Angeles there is a church called the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. It also has very tall walls in the Sanctuary on which hang a series of tapestries created by the artist John Nava. They are known as the “Communion of Saints tapestries.” In them are woven the images of 135 saints from throughout the ages, as well as 12 untitled figures including children of all ages who represent the many anonymous holy people in our midst.

When he created the tapestry designs, Nava did not have depictions of many of the earlier saints. What did they look like? He ended up gathering people at random off the streets to depict them. He chose people he saw at coffee shops and restaurants, people at the beach, people walking their dogs, people like you and me.

Most people were flattered to be models. Some were believers, others were not, but when they were interviewed about the process, they almost all said the same thing: being a saint,

being dressed in the clothes and learning about their saint's story, made them want to act like the saint they were modeling. After the experience they felt better about life and felt connected to the world in a deeper way than ever before.

Connected. That is what the saints do for us, even after they have been long gone from the earth. We become connected to the saints whom we seek to model, and they are connected to us and to Christ. In the Los Angeles cathedral the saints line the walls and they are all gazing toward the cross above the altar, marching towards it, just as the real saints did before them and just as we continue to do each week when we come forward to receive the Eucharist and just as future generations of Christians will do. It is a powerful kind of connection.

Now, we may not know each saint's story, but we do know Jesus' story—just as they did—and that is a powerful connector. It is a connection that is never lost or weakened, even by death. Our faith connects us with the mystery of life in Jesus. We hear the gospel stories about him and stories of the saints' encounters with him and we know our own stories, all of which are part of the greater story of life. We remember Jesus' life, death, and resurrection each week at the Eucharist, and in turn are “re-membered,” brought together, united in the Body of Christ: united in our common faith and story with Him and with all the saints. This “re-membering,” this unity, transforms us so that we may go out renewed and strengthened by the knowledge of our belonging to God, along with those who came before us and those who will come after us.

As Christians, we carry on Jesus' mission of transforming the world by spreading the kingdom of God in our daily lives. We also spread the kingdom message by carrying on the vision of the saints who have inspired us. We keep their light shining into the future. By living out the Christian mission, we honor God, we honor each other, and we honor the lives of those who came before us who also held that same mission. Like them, once we have come to Jesus

Christ, we are his own and remain that way. We will join the great multitude described in Revelation, worshiping God and singing “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever!”