

**WHO ARE YOUR SAINTS?**  
**Sunday After All Saints, Sunday, November 6, 2005**  
**The Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

Today, we remember those who we call saints in the Church. It is one of those few times when our focus is more on the people of faith rather than God. The Greek word in the New Testament for saints is “hagai,” it means “holy ones!” Somehow, the saints are the holy ones among us. It does not mean they are superior to us, nor more pious, nor more faithful. If anything, these people are like us sitting in Church today.

Why do we observe All Saints Day on November 1<sup>st</sup>? Part of the reason is that the Western Church chose the date to counter the ancient religions that worshipped around this date. One of the best known observances was among the Celtic and Druid people ... Samhain. For these ancient people, October 31<sup>st</sup> was their new year’s eve. They believed on this night that the spirits of the dead could cross over the thin veil that separated the material world from the spirit world. Good and evil spirits roamed the earth on this night. The Celts built huge bonfires to ward off the spirits who could wreak havoc among them.

Early Christians observed November 1<sup>st</sup> as All Saints Day and the night before became All Hallows (holy) Eve. We know it better as Halloween. Sadly, Halloween grabs more attention in our world than All Saints Day. It has become a commercial success that rivals only Christmas in the stores. We have reduced this holy observance, this day of obligation for Christians to reason to parade around in costumes pretending to be something that we are not ... or maybe we wish to be!

All Saints Day speaks about the communion of the saints. We understand that we are “surrounded by a cloud of witnesses” and that we share in “the company of heaven.” The saints are part of the faith community’s connection between the present and the past. It is also a link between the present and the future. The saints are important to us because they are the voices of the faithful who have gone before us. The saints point us to Jesus and God. They are ordinary people who have been touched by the extraordinary love and grace of God. Because of this touch, they make a difference in the world because of their faith.

Many of the saints we talk about are those well known people from the Bible or Christian history. There is St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Mary and St. Andrew. There is St. Patrick, St. Bridget, St Francis and countless others. All Saints Day is a festival to celebrate the hope and life that Jesus brings into our midst. However, there are many more people that we need to remember on this occasion. These are the St. Helens, St. Claras, St. Edgars and St. Julians who we don’t read about in the history books or Christian literature.

Answer this question for me, “What saints have influenced you?” Who made Jesus or the Church come alive for you? Who made faith an important matter for you? Often it is people who are not the saints listed on our calendar of saints in the Book of Common Prayer. They are our teachers, parents, grandparents, friends, mentors and others who have helped us come to this place today. When I think of the people who have shaped my faith, my grandparents come to mind. They are now voices from my past, but they have helped me to find my way to faith, the Church and the community of believers.

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My grandmothers come to mine first. My dad's mother was known as Gea. She was my Grandma Close. Her gift to me was the deep appreciation for music in life and in worship. Gea was a church soloist, played the piano and organ. She imparted to me how music could bring me to a deeper relationship with God. My mother's mother was known as little grandma. She was a farmer's wife. She stood only 4 foot 10, but claimed to be almost 5 foot! I remember her mostly in the kitchen preparing food, or doing laundry or working the garden.

My mother was the oldest of 16, I was the oldest of 78 grandchildren ... that meant a lot of cooking! What I remember most about little grandma was the way she prepared favorite food for everybody. When I was at the farm, I always had my favorite apple or rhubarb pie. My brother always got his sugar cookies. My sister always got her green beans. My mom always got her pickled eggs! There was always a good meal and a warm bed waiting there at the farm. Grandma always saw to that. She didn't always get to Church, but she made sure one of my aunts took me. I learned a lot about how to be part of a family from her.

My father's father was Baba to me. I remember with great fondness how he would snatch me out of the car when we arrived to take long walks. He lived across from Woodlawn cemetery and he would take me there. He knew stories about so many people and taught me about respect for the dead. He linked with me the past and created in me an appreciation for stories. My mother's father was big grandpa. He was a farmer ... built like we picture many of them ... stocky, square and strong. He was a quiet man, but I learned how to be a man who could show love. He would wait up the nights we were coming to visit. I always greeted him with a kiss and received a bear hug in return. I remember even more the tears that would form in his eyes when we would leave ... he hated to see people go. I learned from him how to be a man who could head a family and still shown warmth and love.

Isn't it amazing how these older people can be saints? I heard a story recently that when Stalin was coming to power, people around him asked what to do about the Church in Russia. He said to leave it alone ... it was only filled with old ladies ... it would die out soon. Funny how quickly the church sprang back to life in Russia after the demise of communism! The Church always needs saints today ... they are already in our midst. The saints of tomorrow are us!

We are invited to be a saint. We can be the ones to let Christ show through to others. What we need to remember most is to be a saint is to be one who is less concern about our needs and more concerned about making the Church alive for others. If there is to be a Church that alive in the next several generations, we must begin to act like saints today. It's time for us to think about what legacy we will leave and start sharing our faith with the younger people.

Saints are our links to the past Church. There are saints in the making among us ... and it is time for us to move towards the future. We are the next ones called to be the saints, the

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holy ones of God. We are the ones that have the chance to influence the lives and faith of others. Christ calls to be the community of faith that reaches out and makes a difference. What we do now does matter. As we think about those who have influenced us ... we might also think also about who we are influencing. We are invited to link ourselves to both the past and the present. We are invited to become a saint!

May God continue to bless the saints of past, help us to be the saints of today and bring us the saints of tomorrow. Time to get busy saints in the making!