Saint Stephen's EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rev. Jennifer King Daugherty
Feast of All Saints (tr.) – November 2, 2025

Communing with Saints

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; 2 Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

All Saints, Kelly Latimore

[Luke 6:20-31] *Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. But I say to you that*

listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

When I was a child, I learned about the saints from visits to my great-aunt Marge, who lived in a small farming town in eastern Iowa. She was a devout Roman Catholic, a die-hard Braves fan (from their days in Milwaukee), and a passionate poker player.

Every morning, before she put in her dentures, she would have coffee with the saints. She'd take her cup to the kitchen table, spread out a dish towel and carefully open her plastic bag of prayer cards. These are the cards that have a picture of a saint on one side and a special prayer in their name on the other. She had collected them over decades, as memorial tokens at funerals, or gifts from religious shrines.

Marge would take out the stack of cards, shuffle them loosely in her hands, and then choose 10-12. She'd deal them out on the dish towel and invite me to study each picture with her. Then we'd say the prayers together.

It was not a time for questions or chitchat, and only later did I come to understand her affection for St. Joseph (patron of families), St. Paula of Rome (patron of widows), and St. Jude (patron of lost causes). She knew their stories -- their griefs, hardships, and courage -- and they mirrored her own. So, she turned to their lives for solace and inspiration, as naturally as if they had been her great-aunts and -uncles.

Throughout history, humans have held a strong connection and reverence for our ancestors. Many Indigenous peoples of the Americas have ceremonies that invoke the names and spirits of those who have gone before and express gratitude for their role in shaping the present lives of their descendants.

In the Celtic tradition, which preceded Anglican Christianity, ancestors held a sacred and ongoing presence. They were not distant figures of the past, but a constant presence in the community of the living. Honoring them was central to both daily life and ritual practice.

The Celtic festival marking summer's end, *Samhain,* took place from October 31st to November 1st and was an especially important time for

remembering ancestors. It was considered a "thin place" when the worlds of the living and the dead came close to each other and the veil that separated them was lifted. It was not only a period of communion with those forbears, but an experience of "deep time" when past, present, and future gathered into one especially holy moment.[1]

The Episcopal Church's celebration of All Saints Day is an evolution of this tradition. It is officially November 1, but we often transfer its observance to the first Sunday in November, as we do today.

In the earliest centuries of the church, a feast arose to honor all martyrs and then gradually expanded to include all faithful who have lived in holiness – those known and unknown. If you look at the panoply of saints and witnesses on the front of your bulletin, you will see not only St. Mary, St. Joseph and St. Francis, but also Desmond Tutu, Etty Hillesum, Mary Oliver, and Fred Rogers.

If you were to make a collage of the saints in your life – the people who have shown you the way to live in love and integrity – who would they be?

When this sermon is complete, we will rest in silence for a few moments and then gather for the baptism of Rhys Henry Prober. After Rhys is presented and he affirms his readiness for baptism, we will all renew our baptismal covenant together. Part of this covenant is the Apostles' Creed, in which we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, and the communion of saints."

While the phrase "communion of saints" wasn't included in the earliest second-century creed, it was added about 200 years later, after the Church had faced centuries of persecution, division and heresy. The leaders wanted to affirm two things: first, that the Church's holiness doesn't depend on individual virtue, but participation in God's holiness; and second, that the Church is both a visible gathering and an invisible, spiritual communion of all believers – past, present, and future.

The "communion of saints" expressed this mystery and explained "the holy catholic Church" not as an institution, but as an expansive, sacred fellowship — uniting all who share in the divine mystery.

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[1] Richard Rohr, *Yes, And ... Daily Meditations* (Franciscan Media, 2019).

When Rhys is baptized, he will be received into this holy fellowship and marked as Christ's own, forever. Nothing can separate him from the love of God – "neither death, nor life, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation."

And then you will be sprinkled with baptismal water and told to "remember your baptism" – a reminder that this truth claims you, too. *You* have been marked as Christ's own, forever. Nothing can separate *you* from the love of God.

When we affirm that we believe in the "communion of saints," we are expressing our trust that the faithful departed remain with us and in us and work with us and through us. Whether they are our blood relatives, the saints on prayer cards, or the faithful ones whose names have been forgotten, the dead are at one with the living in Christ– we are gathered into one body by God's grace and sustenance.

This means we are never alone, never the first and only person to suffer, or grieve, or experience joy. And that whoever we are – good, flawed, or indifferent -- we are not made this way in isolation. We carry the lived and the unlived lives of our parents, grandparents, and other forebears as far back as our DNA can trace. It does take a village to create a person – we know this is literally and genetically true. There is potential for deep healing and understanding when we honor the full multi-generational cycle of life.[2]

Accepting our place in the communion of saints means that we can take ourselves seriously – we are part of the Great Whole, but not too seriously – we are just a part of it. And it is a touchstone for living — a daily participation in God's holiness, shared and sustained across generations, until all creation is made whole.

So when you leave this place today, remember: you carry the lives of others within you — the saints who shaped you, the ancestors who pray through your hands and heart. The same Spirit who claims Rhys in baptism claims you, too, binding all of us into one body of love that death cannot divide. And for that, we give God thanks and praise!

Amen.

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[2] Ibid.