

Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday, and I want us to reflect on the lesson from the Letter to the Ephesians. This entire scripture is really a great hymn of praise about what God has done for us in Jesus. And woven into the words are the proclamation that all who are in the community of faith are saints, "... with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints."

The writer is saying that all are joined to this promise, not merely those we might think of as especially holy. One modern commentator notes that in his Lutheran congregation the usual Sunday morning greeting of call and response is, "Good morning, saints." "Hallelujah!" Another pastor follows the baptism of every child by carrying that child down the aisle of the church and introducing him or her to the congregation as, 'Saint' and then the baptized child's name. We are all gathered as Saints.

A part of what we do this day is a holding fast to all our saints as we read out of the names of those who have died in the past year. The list declares our loss in this community, the pain of which cannot be forgotten or swept to one side; it can only be carried.

But the remembrance of those gone from us is also marked by our great hope for the promise of God fulfilled in the resurrection. It is not a simple hope, and as The Rev Jan Richardson writes, "Hope is not always comforting or comfortable. Hope asks us to open ourselves to what we do not know, to pray for illumination in this life, to imagine what is beyond our imagining, to bear what seems unbearable."

So All Saints Sunday invites us to both mark a time of remembrance and to move one step beyond it. For we are connected not only with these recently died, but also with all who have long gone ahead of us into the fullness of God's joy. All the saints, in heaven and on earth, are gathered about us as 'the great cloud of witnesses'. While we set aside this Sunday to remember this fact, it is true at every moment.

John Gladstone tells of a young priest he knew in the Church of England who served a very small parish. Once a week they would hold

evening services, and the priest would usually finish with the Eucharist. One evening, so few people gathered for worship that he wondered if it was even worth observing the sacrament. He decided to go ahead anyway, and then was stopped cold when he read the part of the Great Thanksgiving which says, "Therefore with Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven..." He repeated the words again: "Therefore with Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven..." Then he prayed, " God forgive me. I did not realize I was in such company."

Do we realize the presence of such company, when we are plunged into this great mystery? Do we recognize the surrounding and holding of the cloud of witnesses who have marked our way? Perhaps it is simply too large a thing for us to see. So let's start with a smaller piece.

Just for a moment close your eyes and picture those who were once part of your life of faith. Who first brought you to church – whether carrying you in their arms, or leading you with an invitation? Call them up before you now.

In your mind's eye think of those who were most important in teaching you scripture; who showed you some core lesson in faith? See them before you in this time as they were then.

And there is another act of remembrance we desperately need at this time in our national life. So many of us are filled with fear about the coming election. We often feel completely alienated from those whose views and actions seem foreign to us. Now is when we need to remember the saints who lived out a deep compassion for those they might have considered merely enemies. Call up in your imagining those who taught you this kind of profound love in the midst of crisis.

All these we call to mind are the witnesses who surround us today. Now, an act of the imagination pointed toward the future. This morning we are baptizing Rosemary Marcus, age 6 months. We welcome Saint Rosemary into this gathering of the Body of Christ, joining her to the great cloud of witnesses. So picture how you will make her welcome. Imagine

the ways in which you may join with Shane and Clara, to carry out your part of the responsibility for showing her the walk we walk before God.

Finally, let all our acts of imaginative memory and hope be gathered up in this morning's Eucharist, as we too hear those words that join and hold us:

Therefore with Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven... Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven,although we often have not realized we were in such company... with them we sing Holy, Holy, Holy. Thanks be to God.