



November 2012
Volume 85 Number 9

From the Clergy Associate

So great a cloud of witnesses

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...

Hebrews 12:1

Growing up Roman Catholic, my sisters and I had to attend church for all Holy Days of Obligation. When I was very young, I found it hard to understand why we would go to church on November 1 for All Saints' Day, and then have to go again the very next day, November 2, for All Souls' Day.... Although I do not remember all that was read, said, or sung, I recall these Masses with great comfort. Oftentimes these Days would fall on weekdays and we would attend an evening liturgy, so it would be dark and cold outside and the church seemed to be a bit dimmer than usual inside. I remember finding great comfort in being reminded that we were surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, a communion of saints.

To this day, I still find great comfort in "so great a cloud of witnesses" surrounding us.... We are never alone. God promises to always be with us. In our Eucharistic Prayer for All Saints' Day/Sunday we give thanks to God "who, in the multitude of thy saints, has compassed us about with so great a cloud of witnesses, that we rejoicing in their fellowship, may run with patience the race that is set before us; and, together with them, may receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away..." (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 347) Hearing the names of the departed read aloud is also quite sobering. For me, there is the feeling of loss, but also thanksgiving for their lives with us; and always comfort in knowing that we are in the midst of such a great communion of saints. As beloved family members and friends have entered their larger life with God over the years, I have always found it comforting that God has "received them into arms of mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light". (From the Burial of the Dead, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 483)

And the hymns for All Saints' Sunday are always among my favorites; from the simple, yet beautiful Taizé chant of "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom" to the joyful Alleluia's of "For all the saints", to the powerful "I am the bread of life". I look forward to singing these with you on November 4 this year. Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... may we run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

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