

When the Saints Go Marching In

“For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” From the Revelation to John

Sunday is All Saints Day. The notion of saints can be confusing to us Episcopalians; our thinking is a bit fuzzy on the subject. In our Anglican understanding of sainthood we are all saints; dead or alive and we are part of a Great Communion of souls in a relationship that surpasses life and death and grants us access to God’s eternal presence — and I think that thought makes us a bit nervous.

The truth of the matter *is* that saints comes in all shapes and sizes, they come in all colors and they come in both male and female as well as in little baby and child size.

When you think on the real lives of our great saints I think we simply see those wonderful souls who learned some way, somehow to see and trust that God is the beginning and the end of all things. And in understanding that the love of God brackets all of life in this way, they are free to spend themselves in acts that are virtually dripping of God’s love and hope.

I also believe that God offers that potential to love and live without fear to each and every one of us each and every day.

When we offer ourselves to this life held in knowledge that God is in the beginning and the end of all things, our ability to feel Christ’s presence and see God’s astounding beauty everywhere increases beyond measure.

God is constantly at work to offer us the promises of heaven in the here and now. John’s amazing poetic vision in Revelation, which we hear in Year A on All Saints, captures this beautifully. We miss it in our English translation, but John speaks of a world without suffering in both the present as well as a future time. This is astounding to me given the fact that John of Patmos was a prisoner who was exiled for his faith and a pastor whose church and people were suffering daily persecution.

But still he saw the world as alight with God’s redemptive glory—he understood God as the beginning and end of all things and so even his imprisonment could not steal his ability to love God and inspire those who knew him.

“The home of God *is* among mortals,” he says. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more—God is constantly at work offering truth and beauty to a hungry world and *making all things new*.

All of earth is crammed with heaven, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning has said, and I think that being saint means simply being aware of this unassailable truth and then allowing that truth to guide our lives. Our great saints knew this and it is a knowing that is there for us all to live into. It matters not whether we are alive or dead, perfect, or flawed through and through.

We are all part of the communion of saints. We are all invited to live in the knowledge that God does make all things new and that God truly is the beginning and end of all things.

Suffering is an unavoidable part of the human experience. But, a life given to God hope's as its driving force does promise a world more compassionate than we can imagine and is a guiding passion that runs deeper than our souls can fathom. And this union with God's hope reminds us that our lives are gift—our lives are grace.

And we can rejoice in that, even as we plunge ourselves into the mystery of our world which can feel so broken, but which can also be a place that is redolent with God's profound truth, justice, and beauty.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+