

## The Great Communion

Each year All Saints' Day is set aside to teach and celebrate the great mystery of what the Apostle's Creed calls the communion of saints. When we hear the word saint we usually conjure up images of those greats that have come before like St. Francis or Mother Theresa, but today is the day we are reminded that the saints of God are not limited to these exceptional Christians whose names we know so well. But All Saints' is also about remembering ordinary people, like you and me and all of those we love; unknown followers of Jesus who live by faith in his word and practice love and forgiveness toward the relatives and neighbors God has given us. And, our Book of Common Prayer describes the communion of saints in this way: "The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer and praise." You might read that description again. It has so much to teach us about how to be a family of faith. So, being a saint first and foremost simply means deciding to belong to God and then to celebrate that belonging in the lives we all lead together. And being a saint doesn't require our moral and spiritual perfection; it only requires us to share Christ's extraordinary love for the world that God created. Not as easy as it sounds! In fact, the saints are not distinguished by their goodness or perfection. But, they are distinguished by their extravagant love of God, a love that shines so much brighter than anything else about them. It is in this great love for God that ordinary human beings are inspired to do extraordinary things. This time in our history is a great reminder to us all that we need to constantly resolve to choose to love God's way and cast out a hardness of heart that may well find us hating our neighbors. As events like what happened in New York this week occur, we must decide with even greater resolve to love beyond our fear, and to open our hearts and minds further to keep God's love for all as the center of our thinking and in how we view the world. The answer is more love not more fear and suspicion. To choose love for others across such a great divide is perhaps one of the hardest things Jesus ever asks us to do. While there have been times of prosperity and peace, our history always records times of upheaval. And through it all, the people of God—the ordinary people of God—have been called to live lives that reflect the promise of God's love and mercy for the world, the WHOLE world that God created. This is how the famous saints as well as those only known to each of us can guide us. These amazing people, having come through some great struggle, find themselves even more in love with the world than ever, even in all its pain and imperfections. Saints are courageous precisely because they refuse to feed hatred and evil and let it gain control of their lives. They are ordinary people who are faithful because they know that without trust in God, they are weak and vulnerable to the challenges that everyday life presents to us all. The Church exists today because every day, none-to-perfect people like you and I decided to trust and persevere with God, becoming saints because we know that God offers a better way. And that's why we celebrate and remember this coming Sunday that we are ALL part of this joyful company who chooses to love God. We celebrate that we have, in all who've gone before us, what St. Paul calls "such a great cloud of witnesses" and that the faithful departed are as much the body of Christ as we are. It is quite a thing, really. That we are connected to so many. Connected to so much faith. So many stories. So much divine love. Especially in this day and age of alienation. This should give us great hope.

All Saints reminds us that saintly acts are always just really simple acts of love. Simple acts of love can be the hardest of all, but we are not alone as we reach to extend our love to others in this world. We have the power, grace, courage and hope of millennia's of saints who stand behind us and beside us to help us release to the world the love of God which dwells in all of us. Join us this Sunday as we renew our Baptismal Vows and renew with chrism the deeper truth of our lives that we are all marked as Christ's own forever. In these challenging times, may we living saints be bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer and praise; may we all allow the love of Christ, grace of God and the witness of all the saints to guide us.  
Grace and Peace, Stephanie+