

Remembering those who have gone before us

November begins with two important feast days – All Saints (All Hallows) Day on 1 November, and All Souls Day on 2 November. In recent years, these have become a little overshadowed by our society’s adoption of Hallowe’en (see cartoon from *The New Yorker*, at right). Mostly adopted from American culture, the contemporary focus is anything but Christian, despite some elements of its origin being faith-related (as the vigil of All Hallows Day).

In Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican Christianity, the belief that there is a real and powerful solidarity between those who have gone before us to God (saints ‘canonized’ .i.e. declared so by the church and ‘uncanonized’) and those still on their pilgrim way (Paul refers to the latter as saints in his letters). This relationship is referred to as the Communion of Saints.

We honour our ancestors in faith on these two days. We remember their earthly life, whether they were someone in our own lives such as a family member or friend, or a person from a previous time whom we look up to with admiration. Second, we acknowledge that they are now with God – the source of all our lives and of eternal life.



“Look what they’ve done to your creation.”



And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life... I write these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:11-13

The Eternal Choir, Di Bresciani,
Jamberoo Abbey Facebook page,
2 Nov. 2020.

A saint is someone whom the Church believes is in heaven with God. Wrongly, we often think saints are perfect, but their greatest witness is how they coped with the difficulties of life and how they reflected the love of God.

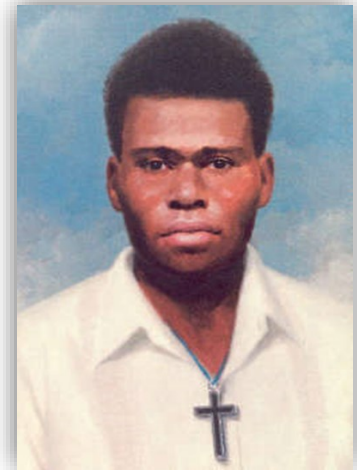
We hallow what God has done through them because we hope to join them. St Paul thought saints were everywhere. I think he was right, canonized or otherwise. For most of us, sanctity and martyrdom will not come in dramatic ways. The daily routine of looking after a sick child or spouse or elderly parent, or of living with a mental, physical, emotional or spiritual illness, or bearing the scourge of being unemployed, homeless or addicted, or being unable to shake off the feeling that we are unlovable: they all bring with them the reality of sharing in the lot of the martyrs and the saints.

This is the holy cloud of witnesses (*Hebrews 12:1*) who saw God in this world and are now fully alive to God in the next, cheering us on in this life and all the way to the next.

Richard Leonard SJ, *The Tablet*, 31 Oct 2020, p. 10.

Catherine McAuley is undergoing the process required for canonization. At present, we refer to her as 'venerable' because of the progress so far in her canonization cause. We live in hope that in the fullness of time, she will become a saint.

Australia and Papua New Guinea each have one canonized saint. In Australia, St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, founder of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred heart, was canonized in 2010, an occasion of joy and celebration for the Sisters of St Joseph. In Papua New Guinea, St Peter To Rot was canonized just recently, on October 19. At the time of his death, he was young man aged only 33 years, married with a young family. During the Japanese occupation of PNG during World War II, he went to his death defending his faith and its teachings.



Spend some quiet time reflecting on our ancestors in faith—those who are formally recognised as saints, and those who lived holy, faith-filled lives known only to those near to them and to God. How do you understand the holy cloud of witnesses St Paul wrote of? The communion of saints? All have entered eternal life, as we will too one day. Ponder the mystery of our participation in the communion of saints and theirs.

We bring our faith and hope before the God of mercy, in prayer.

We stand on this earth not alone but surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses whose lives give us inspiration and courage. They have gone before us into the realm of God's light, members of that great company of the Communion of Saints.

We pray that the Church may be blessed by the example of goodness and holiness in its members, from the most hidden to the most prominent.

We give thanks for the lives of all Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Associates who have walked before us in faith, sharing compassion with the poor, the sick, and the sorrowing.

We pray for all young people who have died. We remember especially those who have died suddenly, those who have died in tragedy. May God bring them to a place of light, peace and healing.

We pray for places in our world where people face death on a daily basis because of violence, hunger, war, or disease. We pray for an end to violence and injustice in our world and that God may turn our hearts in compassion towards those in need.

We pray for those who are mourning. Be with them as they ache with the pain of grieving. Give them hope to look forward to the day when love will never be taken away, when life itself will not be diminished when all that we hold most precious will live and remain with us forever.

Adapted from MIA prayers of remembrance

