

All Saints' Day
Luke 6:20-31

We Remember You*

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Church Pension Group Service of Remembrance
Church of the Incarnation
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I grew up in the Roman Catholic church, and I always liked how there was a patron saint for anything you could think of. You have a lost cause? Pray to St. Jude. You have a lost item? Pray to St. Anthony.

You have an IT problem and the Help Desk isn't open? Pray to St. Isadore of Seville. (Seriously, St. Isadore was a 7th century bishop who tried to record everything that was ever known in a 20-volume work called *Etymologies*. He's considered to be the first database compiler or Wikipedia editor.)

I recently discovered that there is even a patron saint for pensioners, St. Teresa of Gesu. She was a 19th century nun in Spain who founded a religious order called the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Aged. Her calling was ministering to the elderly who had been forgotten by their families and society.

I engage in all this "saint talk" because today is November 1st, the day on which the Episcopal Church and many Christian denominations celebrate the Feast of All Saints. It's fitting for CPG to have its annual Service of Remembrance on this day. Today, we remember not just the celebrities and the rock stars of sainthood – like St. Jude, St. Anthony, St. Isadore of Seville, or St. Teresa of Gesu – but *all* saints who have gone before us.

Now, as someone who has experienced the joys of middle age and its effect on vision, I think that saints are a lot like eyeglasses. What do I mean by that? Well, eyeglasses help us to see more clearly. Their usefulness lies not so much by our looking at them, but rather *through* them. Light shines through our glasses, and we are better able to see the beauty of the world around us.

Similarly, saints help us to see more clearly the love of God in the world around us. Their significance, like eyeglasses, also lies not so much by our looking at them, but rather through them. The divine light shines through their lives, and, by looking at all those who have been touched by these saints, we are better able to see the beauty of creation all around us.

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I really love the Emerson poem that was our first reading. To know that even one life has breathed easier because one has lived – that is to have succeeded. And I suspect that the names who we will soon hear have done that in abundance. The saints in our own lives have helped us to see more clearly the love of God in the world – as today’s gospel reading from St. Luke reminds us – by helping those who are poor, those who are hungry, those who are weeping, or even those who are hated.

People often ask me how I connect my work as an Episcopal priest and my work at CPG. What connects my vocation at the altar at the Church of the Transfiguration with my vocation at my desk on the fourth floor of 19 E. 34th Street? Is there any connection beyond the fact that both my church and my employer are entities that are subject to the authority of the Episcopal Church?

Well, for me, the answer has to do with remembering. During the prayer of consecration at mass, the priest recalls the central teaching of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper by saying: “Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, what each of us does at CPG is connected with the remembrance of those who have done ministry in the church.

Whenever we pay out a lump-sum death benefit, whenever we pay out active or retiree life insurance proceeds, whenever we pay out a pre-retirement survivor benefit, or even make a monthly joint and survivor benefit payment, we are telling the survivor or beneficiary that “we remember your loved one.” We have not forgotten his or her ministry in the world. We remember them, and we also remember you.

And in so doing, we also proclaim our hope that death is never the last word. In the words of the Islamic poem that we heard at the beginning of our service, we tell those who are weeping that “You are never alone.”

We hope, in the words of the Hindu devotional song that we will hear at the end of our service, that the “agonies” and the “sorrows” of those who are weeping will someday go away in an instant.

And we hope that one day, in the words of the Jewish Mourner’s Kaddish, that there will be “abundant peace” for all those who are weeping and for all of us.

Let us give thanks today for all the saints who have gone before us, including the saints in our lives. As we hear their names being read out loud, let us remember the ways in which they have helped us to see the beauty of the divine and the beauty of this earth. And let us always proclaim the hope – in our own work at CPG and beyond – that death is never the last word.