BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

All Saints Day
November 1, 2026
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Rv 7: 2-4, 9-14
Ps 24: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6
1 Jn 3: 1-3
Mt 5: 1-12a

Though, of course, I have known the phrase "the communion of saints" since I was little (I'm not sure what grade we learned the Apostles' Creed in, but it was early), I didn't really think about it too much until I was an adult in this very chapel. Sr. Suzanne Zuercher was standing at this ambo, I think at an Alumnae Memorial Mass, talking about the thin, porous veil that separates this world from the next. That struck me as so true, and now that I am thirty-some years older and know so many more people on the other side of that veil, it rings even truer. In digging a little deeper into the idea of the communion of saints, I picked up the Catechism of the Catholic Church (not something that happens all that often), and read this:

> "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together, forming the Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his Saints is always attentive to our prayers."

So I've been thinking a lot about that this week.

We are presented with some clear images for the communion of saints in today's scriptures. Revelation describes the mystical 144,000 whose robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb. In 1 John we are reminded that we are all God's children now; what we shall be has not been revealed. But we shall see God, as God is. And, in the Beatitudes, we hear Matthew's list of those who are happy or blessed: the poor in spirit, the sorrowful, the meek, those hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted. In other words, nobody who is going to be a big success in this world. Some will call them "losers." In fact, they are the people who understand reality best, who know that everything comes from God and that relying on God's grace and mercy is the only way to succeed, to survive. It's not that they are perfect; that's the "process" part of life. The Oxford Biblical Commentary puts it well: "the 'righteousness' that the saints hunger and thirst for is neither justification nor eschatological vindication but the right conduct that God requires. Seemingly implied is the notion that the saints are not as a matter of fact righteous; rather, righteousness is always the goal that lies ahead: it must be sought." Consoling, when I'm not feeling like I'm living up to the high bar set by the "blessed."

In all honesty, though, the things that have helped me best understand the communion of saints come from "real life." I'll share four examples: a movie, a book, a 5K (of all things!), and part of our community life.

I am guessing that, in 1984, some people in this chapel saw the movie *Places in the Heart*. Set in Texas during the Depression, it tells the story of a widow named Edna, played by Sally Field, trying to hold on to the family farm, despite multiple obstacles, including poverty, treachery, and a tornado. The last scene of the movie is one of the most beautiful I've ever seen. Edna and her family are attending Sunday service in the town's little church, and as the communion is passed, we hear the preacher's voice reading the words of institution. Then, the camera, goes down the pews, stopping for a moment

as each person takes communion. There is a moment of unspoken forgiveness from a wife whose husband was unfaithful. Edna's family's black farmworker, previously run out of town by the Klu Klux Klan, is there and passes the plate to the family he lived with and grew to love. And, in the last frame, the deceased sheriff of the town, Edna's husband, passes the plate to the young, black man who accidentally shot him – and who was later lynched by some of the men seen a pew or two ahead.
The communion of saints.

In Ann Patchett's latest novel, *Whistler*, the protagonist remembers a serious car accident she was involved in as a child. She and her beloved stepfather, who is seriously injured, are stranded in the car that has gone off the road and landed in a deep ditch during a snowstorm. As they try to survive the night, he tells her a story that he, a book editor, had read in a prospectus. The story is about a woman rancher in Wyoming who is thrown by her horse in a remote area and hurt quite badly. As days go by and she is not rescued, people she has loved earlier in her life – now dead – come, one by one, to encourage and sustain her until she is saved.
The communion of saints.

Just yesterday, my friend Laurie and I participated, for the fourth year in a row, in the Carrera de los Muertos, the Race of the Dead. It's an annual race in Pilsen, always held on or near the Dia de los Muertos, and its spirit and joy are remarkable. 9000 people – walking, running, dancing, honoring the recently deceased and the very much alive. This year, as we waited for the race to begin, we made friends with a couple from Waukegan, there with the wife's co-worker, who were enthusiastic, lively, and beautiful. As we talked about how much we appreciated the good heart among the crowd, the wife turned to me, and said, "There is no time for hate."
The communion of saints.

And my last example comes from our community life. A particularly sacred time, for me, is at our communal penance services in Advent and Lent. After the liturgy of the word and examination of conscience, we sit, in this darkened and quiet chapel, while those who wish make individual confessions. We wait, together, while each of us tries to fathom and live into our redemption.
The communion of saints.

You've had these experiences, too. I hope that today you can take some time to remember and acknowledge and cherish those times – when the veil has been thin, when love, joy and forgiveness have overpowered separation, misunderstanding, and despair. When we bring those moments into the present, we remember that we are part of the communion of saints. That we can sing, with the choir in the last scene in Places in the Heart, "This is [our] story, this is [our] song."