
The Contagious Communion of Saints

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

“I believe in the communion of saints.” Many of us say that phrase daily when we recite the Apostles’ Creed. On this Sunday, All Saints’ Sunday, we will say it as part of the Baptismal Covenant when we baptize new Christians.

“I believe in the communion of saints.” I don’t mean that I believe in the people that the general world, outside the church, calls saints. You know: Saint Francis, Saint Mary, Mother Teresa, Saint so-and-so. They are all wonderful people, yes, and they are all saints; and, yes, I believe very much in them, too.

But I believe in something bigger. I believe in the community of saints. I believe that when God touches someone, that person becomes part of a community. And when God touches someone in baptism, that person becomes contagious – from the Latin word meaning “to touch.” When a person is touched by God in baptism, I believe that person becomes contagious. That person becomes a carrier.

Yes, in these days of obsession with even the slightest of germs and viruses, we all know—or think we know—what being contagious is. It is generally something we are scared of!

But I believe in something far more powerful than those deadly diseases. I believe that the touch of God is contagious. I believe that when God touches us, we become a carrier. We become a carrier of grace. We become a contagious communion!

Maybe that condition does not have the same strength from carrier to carrier, but we do all carry that condition. The communion of saints is a group of people who are carriers of grace. And that grace is so powerful that we can catch it from each other. In fact, that grace is so powerful that we can catch it from people who are alive or dead. We are grace-carriers.

Some of the carriers of God’s grace have names that we do not remember. They taught us Sunday School, or they taught our children Sunday school, or they taught our neighbors’ children Sunday School. Or they served food at our parish dinners and at the homeless shelters.

And, most of the times, these carriers of grace, this communion of saints, were not even at a physical church at all. They were at their businesses, their places of work. You have met them “in school, or in lanes, or at sea – in church, or in trains, of in shops, or at tea” (Hymn 293 in *The Hymnal*, words by Lesbia Scott). They were doing things like making peace, being merciful, being pure in heart – the very things that Jesus calls “Blessed” in the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The actual church is not the place where those attributes are caught the most often. They show up where we work and where we engage in relationships: in our families, in our neighborhoods, even in our politics. They show up wherever grace-carriers touch people.

The carriers of grace, the saints, are not always the strong-looking and healthy-looking. Often, they look like those who are sad and in mourning: “Blessed are those who mourn.” Jesus said. Often, they look like those who are forlorn and

depressed: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Jesus said.

I believe in the communion of saints, those people who have shown me some kind of grace even in the strangest of places and conditions, and even when they were unaware they were carrying and transmitting grace. Yes, that grace is so contagious that we can catch it from people even after they have died. That’s why we celebrate All Saints’ Day.

You’ve had those kinds of people in your life, too. You knew they had weaknesses and quirks and idiosyncrasies. But they carried something greater than their weaknesses; they carried grace in the midst of their weaknesses. That’s what made their very weaknesses carriers of the contagion. Grace is contagious, and it is made strong in weakness – just as St. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the power of Christ is made perfect in weakness.

I believe in the contagious communion of saints. This contagious communion is how the amazing grace of God is transmitted from generation to generation. Join us this Sunday as baptize some more saints, as we touch them with the contagious love of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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