
Places Of The Holy Past

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

I visited two special places last week. I will call them places of the holy past. The first was a local mausoleum, the final resting place of so many holy bodies. From time to time, I officiate at burial services there; sometimes the funeral homes will simply telephone one of the Cathedral priests to preside. I always try to accept the request to preside at a funeral; they are holy events.

The mausoleum, with huge slabs of marble, can be cold and silent. When I am there after a service, I am struck by eerie quiet. I know that caskets and bodies are present, but I am also aware of how empty the space seems. The names on the crypts signify people of the past. Sometimes, the only living element there seems to be memory. The mere name of a deceased loved one, chiseled into the cold stone, can evoke warm and precious memories. I am touched there, even in the emptiness.

Also last week, I visited another place of the holy past. This was my own deceased grandmother's house. I call it my grandmother's house, even though it also belonged to my grandfather for a while, and it was where my father grew up. But while I was growing up, it was always my grandmother's house. She died some time ago, and the house has been changed dramatically. For my father's birthday, and with the generosity of its present owners, we arranged a return visit for him.

Even though the house is significantly different, it brought back wondrous memories of my own childhood-staying the night in that room, playing on those back stairs, running in the yard. But what also made the house holy was its present activity. Even though I did not even know the residents who are there now, I loved and appreciated their very activity. I actually liked seeing all the marks of their life in that space. Homes are made for all the pieces of our daily "stuff": our meals and leisure, our joys and worries, all together.

In our spiritual lives, we can remember the past in two ways, both of which are holy. One way is to take the time to be empty and quiet, to intentionally refrain from our present schedules of hurry and fret. It may mean visiting a large and quiet space, like a cemetery; if we listen closely enough, we might hear memories singing and dancing there. Churches can be that way, too, when they are not hosting large gatherings. This is why consecrated space serves a very useful purpose even when no one is inside; that holy and quiet space touches our souls.

However, the other way to remember the holiness of the past is to live into the holiness of the present. Very often, for instance, at funeral gatherings themselves, families begin to laugh and smile with one another. Old friends see one another for the first time in years. A new sense of holy community begins to emerge, even in the sadness.

One holy way of honoring the past is to fully enjoy the present. Old houses, for instance, are not meant simply to lie empty and still. They are meant to be lived in again, and over and over again. Churches are not meant only to point backwards; they are meant to be full of present people and hope for the future, as well.

Holiness-a sense of the presence of God-arrives as we quietly ponder the past, and as we remember our loved ones of the past. But holiness also arrives when we live fully into the present. No house, and no church, and even no cemetery is meant

to be frozen in time. The best memories are those which have the power to create new life in the present.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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