
We Remember

A sermon by Canon Cathy Zappa
The Sunday after All Saints' Day – Year A

I'm going to take a page out of the Book of Revelation and, like John, tell you a story about something I've seen—a vision I had this week of the Communion of Saints and the Kingdom of God.

That's right. I have visions. We all do. That's a big part of what we do as Church: we see things—things that, sometimes, others can't see, at least not yet. And we remember, especially in our scriptures and worship, what others have seen and heard before us. We're shaped by these visions, and they become ours, and we cast them out into the world.

So yes, I had a vision, here, at our Homeless Requiem on All Saints' Day.

After months of preparation, I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count (that is, except for our ushers!) from many nations, peoples, streets, and shelters—and from no shelter at all except that provided by the One seated on the throne.

I saw all kinds of saints, gathered here to serve and be served, to bless and to be blessed, to remember and to be remembered. There were saints from this parish, preparing and caring for our guests in so many ways. There were saints from Soul Changers Recovery Foundation, in crisp white shirts and black slacks, proudly helping people navigate our halls. I saw saints, humbly washing the dirty, tired feet of strangers; and I saw saints, bravely letting a stranger see and wash their dirty, tired feet. I saw saints from Atlanta Mission, who'd experienced such hospitality here that they were eager to come back next year... to volunteer.

I saw all these saints, and more, standing before this sanctuary, with candles in their hands. And they cried out in out in a loud voice, saying, "We remember."

And I saw Dean Candler standing behind the altar, flanked by two deacons, his arms extended out in prayer. "We remember," he said, and waited. And I heard 52 names read—names of saints who died while homeless this last year. I heard a bell toll 52 times. And I saw 52 crosses carried up and laid in a basket in front of this altar. The basket was disturbingly full.

But that's not all I saw. During the procession of crosses, I saw a man shuffle down the aisle and up the steps, toward the altar; but he wasn't carrying a cross. He held only his lit candle, and was on a mission that only he knew. I know him from Church of the Common Ground, and I know that he can be unpredictable and easily agitated, because of his schizophrenia. I also know Dean Candler (my boss!), and I know that his preference is that liturgy run smoothly and as planned.

As it became clear that Bobby, we'll call him, was headed to the altar and toward an unplanned meeting with Dean Candler, the celebrant (and my boss), in the middle of the Eucharist prayer, I started to come out of my stall—and out of my skin.

Then I saw this: Bobby reached and handed Sam his lit candle. The dean gracefully and graciously, took it from his hand,

handed it Canon Williams on his right, and put his hands back up in position, as Bobby processed back down the steps to his seat.

Later that night, Bobby got agitated on the bus that was to take him back to Woodruff Park, so agitated that he was invited to find another ride home. As we were sorting all this out, I got to spend more time with him. At one moment, he sounded like a ranting, mad man, which could sound scary if you didn't know him. But at the next, he acted like a frightened child himself, tucking his head into the curve of my neck and holding on for dear life, making me promise over and over that we would get him back to Woodruff Park.

"I miss Walter," he said at one point. Walter was one of the names read at the service and a close friend of his, who had died recently. "He shouldn't have died. I had to do something for him. I didn't have a cross, so I took up a candle for him. That was ok, right? I had to do something for him. I miss Walter."

As I got a glimpse into the chaos of his world, and in his mind, I recalled his certainty and confidence marching down the aisle. For one moment, at least, he'd known what to do and where he was going: he was offering a candle to remember his dear friend Walter. He had heard the dean say at the offertory that we all have something to offer. And he believed it.

Remembering matters.

For those of us who are grieving, we remember our loved ones as a way to keep loving them—to honor them, and celebrate the gift of their lives, and to stay connected to them. *Remembering is an act of love.*

But we don't remember only the dead. We also remember the living. We remember people like Bobby, who live in the shadows: in parks or in shelters, in prisons and other institutions, in fear or isolation in our own homes. We remember those who are still going through the great ordeal, whatever that is for them. We remember those who feel invisible, abandoned, forgotten—who fear that they'll disappear into oblivion without anyone knowing, or caring.

And we promise that we do see, and we do care, and we will strive for justice and peace for all people. *Remembering is an act of justice.*

We *keep* striving for justice and peace, and we don't give up, because we have a vision, and because we remember God's promises to us: That we all, this great multitude, will come through the great ordeal, and will be made new, and will stand before the throne of God giving thanks and singing praises, as one holy and diverse people. That hunger and thirst will be no more, and God will wipe away every tear. *Remembering is an act of hope.*

So on All Saints', we remember. We remember those who have died, and those who are suffering still. We remember God and God's promises to us. And we remember who *we* are, and who we're called to be—who we've *promised* to be, with God's help: Christians baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Members of Christ, growing into God's vision for us and into our baptism, day by day. Persevering in resisting evil and repenting when we mess up. Proclaiming by word and deed the good news of God in Christ. Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

Remember your baptism. Remember your vision. Remember who you are, and who you're becoming.