

Column

A decade ago next year, I returned to the church of my youth. On this visit, I walked through each floor of the ‘new’ education building (constructed in 1963 when I was a boy). Each contained memories.

In the Primary Department, I could see Mrs. Siffries seated in a chair telling a Bible story. In another room in the same department, I could see a husband-and-wife team helping us press autumn leaves rich in color between two pieces of wax paper using an iron.

One floor higher in the Junior Department, I remember where I sat in the opening assembly. I could see the minister’s wife standing at the lectern giving a devotional. Off to the sides of this larger room are a number of smaller ones used for classes. In each, I could picture faithful adult leaders as well as my classmates.

November begins with All Saints’ Day and continues on to Thanksgiving. On Nov. 1, Christians of extraordinary piety are remembered, New

Testament greats no less than others throughout Christian history are recalled. Saints from the Bible include such ones as Mary the bearer of the Incarnate One, Luke the Evangelist and Physician, Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles and Stephen the first Christian Martyr. Later saints include such people as Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and martyr; Augustine of Canterbury, missionary to the British Isles; Thomas Cranmer, architect of the Book of Common Prayer and martyr; and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the uncompromising Lutheran pastor executed by the Nazis in 1945.

If we know our Bibles, we recognize that the concept of sainthood extends beyond the “top 10 percent of the class.” All who profess faith in Christ are called to be saints (1 Corinthians 1:2). These latter saints would surely include those faithful souls who taught me in my formative years in Sunday School.

Meanwhile, Thanksgiving focuses on gratitude. Typically, Americans on this day – if they think beyond food and football – recall the blessings of the

past year and thank God for all His provisions, material and spiritual.

Might not these two emphases be combined? Why not include saints, ancient and modern, in our list of things for which we are thankful?

Paul gives us our lead in Philippians 1:3 when he writes, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Here Paul is thinking of living Christians. Even so, I don’t think he would object if we expanded his words to include those who have departed in the faith of Christ, after all, we profess in the Apostles’ Creed a belief in the “Communion of Saints.”

If we know our theology, we know the fellowship of believers referenced in this Creed include those who have died in advance of the Second Coming and who are absent from the body and present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). It also includes those who are alive and active in Christian work today.

The latter are part of the “Church militant here in earth.” You and I are part of this number, but only a thin veil separates us from those who have gone before. When we gather for the Lord’s Supper, we “join together with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven.” It is as if the veil is pulled aside. We are one in the body of Christ.

November is a beautiful month. The two emphases – saints and thanksgiving – sit comfortably together. Let’s maintain this unity throughout the whole month.

O MOST loving Father, who willest us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee, and to cast all our care on thee, who carest for us; Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which thou hast manifested unto us in thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer).

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