

When we think of saints, we may think of Peter, who was so profoundly grateful for the redeeming grace of Jesus that after the resurrection, he lived and died in pursuit of sharing that redeeming grace with as many as he could. Through him, we see that even those who clumsily bumble through their relationship with Jesus are beloved of God and are necessary to the building of God's kingdom.

We may also think of Martin Luther King, Jr. – another saint of God who illuminated the love of God in Christ for the outcast of his day. We, too, have a dream because through him, we see God's light and hear God's voice. Because of this saint and others like him, we can better recognize (and be held accountable for) racial injustice and inequality.

We've come to think of saints, Peter and Martin are two solid examples, as being transparent – not reflecting the light and love of God so much as the light and love of God shining through them. And because they are able to get themselves out of the way and let the light shine through them, God's light illuminates not them, but the things they see – to what *they* love so that others of us can see the beauty and holiness of what they behold and treasure. We see through Martin's eyes that all people are equal in God's eyes, for example. We see through Peter's eyes the redemptive love of God that is freely offered to all of God's people.

The saints also remain present with and minister to the hurts of the world: the saints wipe away the tears of those who weep, provide sustenance to those who are physically or spiritually hungry, share what they have with those who have nothing. They do it as a response to the abundant grace of God.

Another notable example is Mother Teresa, whose ministry brought light and life to those about whom the beatitudes were written. She honored the lowest, tended the sickest, and embraced the ones deemed untouchable. Like all our other saints, her ability to transparently shine forth God's love will continue to reach the hearts of generations upon generations of those who seek to serve Christ by serving others.

I think it's a lot easier to see others as saints of God than it is to see ourselves as saints of God. The way we navigate the joys and hardships of our lives informs others about the character of God, just as much as the Peter's love for those who have not encountered the transforming power of Jesus' life and death, or Martin's longing for racial equality, or Teresa's ministry to the untouchables.

I've been reading about Mother Teresa recently. Apparently, she spent most of her ministry feeling alienated from God. She felt faithless. She felt like a fraud. There is a book out of some of her correspondence that she wrote detailing this sense of spiritual failure called *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*. Her confessions are heart-wrenching. She writes, "Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great, that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear."

Yet just a few months later, in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, Teresa proclaimed to the world that she accepted the award in the name of the poor: "And through this award and through all of us gathered here together, we are wanting to proclaim the good news to the poor that God loves them, that we love them, that they are somebody to us, that they too have been created by the same loving hand of God, to love and to be loved."

To accept Mother Teresa as a saint is to take her (doubts and all!) as one who loved the poor as Jesus taught, even when she didn't feel God's presence. I offer this, not to diminish her ministry in any way, but as reassurance. Despite not recognizing the near presence of Christ through much of her own life, she remained open and transparent so that God's light shined right through her to those who abide in God's heart. Despite what she believed to be a lack of faith, despite feeling like a hypocrite, she was steadfastly devoted to the teachings of Jesus and work in front of her.

"What we celebrate when we celebrate All Saints is not the superhuman faith and power of a select few but rather God's ability to use flawed people to do divine things."<sup>1</sup>

It's a relief that God's bar isn't too high – God just asks that each of us do the next right thing that's in front of us, and to do it for God's sake, not our own. God chose Peter, despite his persistent inability to get out of his own way. God chose Martin, in spite of the white community's resistance to hearing Truth proclaimed by a black man. God chose Teresa, despite her shame and frustration at not being as faithful and perceptive of God's presence as she believed she should be.

They are counted among the saints because their vocation was letting God's light and love to shine through them. And that is the vocation to which we are called as well ~ which means we are to serve Christ by serving others, and to love God by

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<sup>1</sup> Nadia Bolz Weber at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2013/11/778/>

praying for our enemies ... by striving for justice and peace among all people and respecting the dignity of every human being. We don't do any of this in order to earn God's grace and love ~ that's already been freely given to us. Instead, we serve the Christ in others and love our neighbors as ourselves because God first loved us.

Many of us have come this morning with hearts that are heavy with the loss of someone dear, someone who has loved us and served us and respected us. Someone who we'd frankly rather still have here in this room as a living person and not as a member of the cloud of witnesses in the narthex. We'd rather be standing behind them in line for communion than adding them to the litany of saints. They have left holes in our lives that we have little choice but to learn to live around.

But there is meaning to be found in our grief.

God is not impervious to the pain of death, remember. Jesus, too, had a friend who died, and for whom he wept.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning of our grief is found in the knowledge that while death is a wrenching, painful reality to us, it's ultimately meaningless to God. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, God overcame death, and it no longer has a hold on us or our beloveds.

That meaning is found in the beauty and love and grace and joy that our beloveds shined in our innermost heart ~ a light and love whose source was God, and which will always have the power to bring out the best parts of ourselves.

And that meaning is found in the mystical body of Christ ~ in which death is never the final word because in both life and death we are very much connected to God and to one another.

Like Peter, Martin and Teresa, we are to get out of our own way, relentlessly work for justice and peace, and seek and serve the Christ in all persons regardless of how worthy/unworthy we deem ourselves. This is how we (who are flawed, hurting, faithful people) live as God's saints ~ by making ourselves transparent so that God's light and love shine through us.

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<sup>2</sup> Weber notes that perhaps Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was his way of slapping death in the face before defeating it once and for all.