

A Cloud Of Witnesses

Hebrews 12:1-3

All Saints Sunday is a day to remember those people who have been a major influence in our life of faith. If we put it in terms of our Running on Faith, we might think of these people as the Road Signs along the way for all of the individual saints in our lives helped point the way to our becoming the person we are today.

The author of Hebrews eloquently lists all the people of faith who influenced the people of Israel. And then he has this to say: Hebrews 12:1-3 (NRSV)

[1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,

I love that description, not just "A Cloud Of Witnesses" but "A Great Cloud Of Witnesses" surrounds us every day. This Great Cloud of Witnesses is filled with the Saints who have influenced our lives and our faith. So, what is a Saint. My favorite definition of a Saint comes in the form of a story.

A little boy attended Church with his Grandfather one Sunday. Grandpa's church had beautiful stained-glass windows. Grandpa told his grandson that the windows contained pictures of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, Saint John, Saint Paul, and a whole lot of other saints of the church.

When the boy got home, he told Mom and Dad all about it. Dad, wanting to be funny and curious about what his son had learned, asked, "What is a saint?" The boy thought for a minute and then replied, "A saint is a somebody the light shines through."

I've always thought that was a pretty good definition of a Saint. You see those people in our lives who not only introduced us to Christ and the faith but lived out their faith in such a way as to let us see the light of Christ in them and through them.

Who are your saints? Who are the people in your life who let the light of God shine through them for you to see?

Think about that but also think about the question: "Whose Saint, are you?" That may be an even more important question because your life of faith and my life of faith have a huge influence on others. We don't know who is watching or who is modeling their life and faith after ours.

We are Saints for each other. Have you ever noticed how people love to point out family resemblance? They say things like, "You look just like your father." or "You've got your mother's nose." Or maybe it's just a mannerism that you've picked up that reminds them of a relative.

Sometimes you catch yourself, when you suddenly see your parent's finger on the end of the hand you have shaking in your child's face. Or when you hear your mother's words or your father's favorite phrase come pouring out of your mouth. You suddenly see your own family resemblance.

We are the Children of God, heirs of the Kingdom, brothers and sisters with Christ Jesus, the Son of God. As Saints, our deepest hope is that others will see the family resemblance in every aspect of our lives and faith.

Not only is there a Great Cloud of Witnesses for us, we are also a part of the Great Cloud of Witnesses for others.

It was baseball season in a small Pennsylvania town. If you know anything about Little League baseball, you know it is also a time when little boys' hearts and egos are on the line. A certain ten-year-old boy had ridden the bench most of the season. But in the championship game, his coach finally called him up to bat.

The little boy's whole extended family had turned out for this very special game. His parents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, second cousins, you name it, they were all there, cheering and clapping and shouting words of encouragement.

The little boy swallowed his anxiety and stepped up to the plate. He gripped the bat and stared hard at the pitcher.

Whoosh! The pitch flew by him. Strike one!

From the stands, his family cheered him on.

"You can do it! You can do it!"

So, he lifted his bat again and waited for the pitch.

Again, he swung and connected with air. Strike two!

His shoulders started to slump and his hands began to sweat, as he stared down the pitcher one last time. The ball flew by for strike three! The other team jumped and shouted for joy, while the little boy's teammates gave him the silent treatment as they left the field.

Our little batter slumped over on the dugout bench, put his head in his hands, and began to cry. But his crying was interrupted by the sound of his father's voice: "Son," he said, "the game's not over."

Lifting his head, the boy saw his family, all of them, even his frail grandmother, spread out across the field, waiting to play. They began cheering loudly as the boy picked up his bat.

His father pitched the ball, and the boy swung. Crack! The ball flew into the outfield, and the boy took off for first base. As he rounded the bases, cousins, uncles, and aunts shouted words of encouragement. Somehow, all those able adults were unable to corral the ball he had hit. As this little boy headed for home plate, his father stood behind the plate and welcomed him with open arms. They celebrated his home run by lifting him on their shoulders and carrying him around the field.

What a magnificent reminder of today's text. And what a magnificent reminder of who we, as a Church and the people of God, are called to be and do.

Take a few minutes to think about all those people whose shoulders of faith you have climbed. Give thanks to God for their faith and faithfulness. And then think about all those who look to you and are lifted by you on the shoulders of your faith. Give thanks to God for allowing you the privilege of being a Saint for someone else.