

So, Who's *Your* Patron[ess] Saint?

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Because I talked about Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation last Sunday, I think it's only fair that today we look at the Roman Catholic practice of honoring patron and patroness *saints*. I'll admit I was unaware that there are over 10,000 named saints in Catholicism - like St. Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of students and universities, learning and memory [one who hopefully can help a person keep track of all those other saints!] Nor did I know that the practice of adopting "patron" saints goes back to the building of the first churches in the Roman Empire; many of which were built over the graves of Christian martyrs. Those churches were then given the name of that martyr, and it was believed that the martyr - now in the presence of the Holy One - would be an intercessor, praying for those who worshiped there. Soon, churches were being dedicated to other saintly men and women - individuals who were not buried at that particular site; though some relic [or token] of that person was often placed inside the altar of that church building.

By the Middle Ages the practice of adopting a "patron" saint had spread beyond church buildings, to include other facets of everyday life - one's occupation or interests, health or family concerns, community or country. And these saints were chosen as "patrons" of things that had been central to their own lives. For example, Francis of Assisi was well-known to be a lover of Nature; therefore he is the patron saint of animals and the environment. Louise de Marillac, a 17th Century French nun, whose life-work was caring for the poor, the sick, and the neglected in hospitals and orphanages, is the patroness saint of social workers. Joseph was a carpenter, a natural choice to be the patron saint of carpenters. He was also a caring father to young Jesus, though I'm not sure that's how Saint Joseph got its name.

Anyway, the beauty of this practice of identifying - and identifying *with* - faithful women and men who loved and served the Holy One, is that

it reminds us that our lives remain connected to - and enriched by - all those honorable people who have preceded us. And the continuing expansion of this list of patron saints, conveys the impression that we can declare for ourselves who our own “patron saints” might be. By definition, a “saint” need not be a super-sacred icon, chosen and venerated by the larger Church. A saint is *anyone* whose life has been impacted by an understanding or experience of the Holy One; and who, in turn, impacts the lives of others because of that sacred connection. And the saints who have touched our lives can be far from perfect, just like the notable saints from Scripture. Saint Peter, *three times* denies even knowing Jesus; yet Jesus still entrusts him to lead those other deserting disciples, once they regain their courage and faith.

So, Who is *Your* Patron or Patroness Saint? What good and faithful person [or persons] touched your life, and thereby continues to be a part of your ongoing Faith Story? Anybody....?

All Saints Sunday is an excellent day for you and me to *remember*. To remember the amazing life of Jesus Christ, in the breaking of the Bread and the sharing of the Cup. To remember the wonderful lives of those wonderful people who told us about the God of Love, and who showed us Divine compassion. It's also the perfect day for you and me to consider how we can continue to articulate - and show - that love to other people. Because throughout our community and throughout the world, so many people today really need to hear some good news. And what better news to share, than the message of Divine Compassion that we ourselves have received through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. A Divine Compassion that we have experienced - and continue to experience - through the faithful lives of one another, and of all those other wonderful saints!