

A GUIDED REFLECTION ON HOLINESS, DESIRE,  
AND THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES.

# ALL SAINTS



# & ALL SOULS

*Fiona Koefoed-Jespersen*  
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“On All Saints Day,  
it is not just the saints of the church  
that we should remember in our prayers,

but all the foolish ones and wise ones,  
the shy ones and overbearing ones,  
the broken ones and whole ones,  
the despots and tosspots  
and crackpots of our lives,  
who, one way or another,  
have been our particular fathers and mothers  
and saints,

and whom we loved  
without knowing we loved them  
and by whom we were helped to whatever  
little we have  
or ever hope to have,  
of some kind of seedy sainthood  
of our own.”

- *Frederick Beuchner, The Sacred Journey*





# SAINTS

If you leaf through the King James version of the Bible, you will find lots of references to saints. The NIV tends to use the more ordinary "God's people".

But either way, most times, in the New Testament, it is a translation from the Greek *hagios*, meaning holy. It's the same word used for the Holy Spirit.

**We are the holy ones.**

Holy is that sense we get when we brush up against "life in its most pure, raw, unadulterated forms". Something in us instinctively knows in those moments that there is deep meaning beyond the rational or explicable.

Rob Bell says, "A saint is someone who is no longer fighting the great mystery, but has chosen to participate in it."\*

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...*  
*Ephesians 2:12*

*"Set yourselves apart for a holy life. Live a holy life, because I am God, your God. Do what I tell you; live the way I tell you. I am the God who makes you holy."*  
*Leviticus 20:7-8*

## REFLECT:

How do you instinctively react to that word - holy?

What connections or associations come up?

Is it a word you can own? Why or why not?

\* Quotes taken from his *Holy Shift* tour in 2018





# ENCIRCLED

A golden, stylized branch or leaf design, possibly representing a tree or a plant, positioned to the right of the word 'ENCIRCLED'.

**WE ARE SURROUNDED. ENCIRCLED. ENCOMPASSED.**

*“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” Hebrews 12:1-2*

What image comes to mind as you consider these words? Can you draw it here?



# FOOTSTEPS

I get my love of cathedrals from my dad. I can't walk past one without feeling the tug within me to step inside, walk the cloister and the aisles, step down into the crypt.

A few years ago, while we were living in Luxembourg, we took a day trip into France to visit Metz, and as always my compass drew me straight towards the towering Saint-Étienne cathedral in the centre of this romantically-dishevelled French town.

Inside, I wandered around with my face turned upward – this church has the largest expanse of stained glass in the world. As I wandered back up the central aisle, I looked up one more time and saw them: around the top of the nave there was a long row of tall windows with elegant figures standing looking back down at me, their dresses swirling.

I squinted up at the elaborately curled letters underneath each figure: Elizabeth, Anne, Catherine, Therese, Julian... I smiled in recognition at these great women of faith. Here was my literal cloud of witnesses, gathered above my head as I walked through the church that day.

As I stood, face-upturned, taking in their beauty, I added my own names to the cloud: Carol, my Sunday School teacher who still writes me handwritten letters full of faithful encouragement. Alice, my youth leader, who allowed me to ask all the hardest questions and first encouraged the gift of teaching in me. Shannon, who sat with me with all her gathered wisdom week after week as we crafted teaching plans for our church. I am indeed surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

I dragged my eyes away from the windows finally, but as I turned to head back towards the doors, I saw it before me - the heavy stone slabs covered with a thousand coloured lights.

The light, pouring through the high windows, created a path for me to walk – all the colour, all the beauty, all the individuality of those women high above streaming down and guiding me back out into my own life.

They guide me, these women. By their faith and by their love. By their hope and by their steadfastness. We are surrounded by a great cloud, who all bear witness to Love - the same yesterday, today, and forever more.



# EXERCISE

**TAKE A BIG PIECE OF PAPER AND USE THE WHOLE SPACE TO REMEMBER THE SAINTS IN YOUR OWN LIFE.**

**Who are the "Saints" that you remember?**

- Who in your childhood were key figures who formed your sense of self and God (even if you weren't raised in a faith tradition)?
- Who are the people along your life's journey who have had a significant impact on your spiritual awareness, growth, and healing?
- Who are those writers, faith leaders and traditional Saints that have inspired you along the way?

You can make this as creative as you like, maybe grouping them in categories, drawing a timeline of your life's journey, or using images to represent them.

*"The saints have no need of honour from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them. But I tell you, when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by tremendous yearning."*

*Bernard of Clairvaux*

**REFLECT:**

As you look over the names you have recalled, what desire is awakened within you? What yearning do they inflame within you?

In the same way that the stained glass created a colourful path for me, how might the saints of your life help you discern the values, desires and direction for your own journey?





# OUTWARD



*“Sanctify yourself and you will sanctify society.” — Francis Of Assisi*

*“People have no idea what one saint can do: for sanctity is stronger than the whole of hell.” — Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain*

*“But I say that even as the holy and the righteous cannot rise beyond the highest which is in each one of you, So the wicked and the weak cannot fall lower than the lowest which is in you also.” — Khalil Gibran, The Prophet*

As you finish, take some time to sit quietly, breathe deeply, and hold in gratitude all that you have thought, explored, wrestled with and received.

All of our own spiritual growth becomes most meaningful when we are able to turn it outward, to our homes, our neighbourhoods, our world.

**Is there one thought, one idea, that you might enact in this coming month, for the good of those around you and creation?**

# Thank you.

It is a gift and an honour to get to journey with you. I hope this guided reflection for All Saints Day (or whenever you are doing it!) has helped you connect with the Holy within you, and with the great mystery that we call God.

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*Fiona Koefoed-Jespersen*

