

All Saints
November 1, 2009
Christ Church

When I was a child, our family would go out to Holy Cross Cemetery for All Souls Day, November 2. A priest from the Diocese, accompanied by cross and acolytes would lead a procession of the families whose loved ones were buried there. We would weave through the walkways that frame the various family sections. All would pray the rosary as we walked.

I can still see the old familiar names on the head stones: mostly Irish and German – O’Neil, (my mother’s family name), Ritter, Holtzgreffe, Edleblut, Cole. These were families that worshiped every week with my family – generations of folks who had been in Richmond since the latter part of the 19th Century.

The tradition of visiting the cemetery at All Souls dates back to the Middle Ages. Christians made it a practice to pray for their departed loved ones. This would assure those who

had died help in making the transition from purgatory and into paradise with Our Lord.

I think that when we participated in All Souls liturgy, there was a much bigger reason for being there. We wanted simply to remember those we love but see no more. My Mother always grew a field full of chrysanthemums of all different colors. She arranged them in large baskets to place on the graves of her parents and grandparents. I helped her. I learned from this how important it is to take time to remember!

Remembering is a vital part of being human. On the one hand, we must remember to pay our bills, go to the grocery store, feed the cat – most of us suffer with forgetting these days, since there is so much to keep up with and remember.

But, the kind of remembering I am talking about is different. When the ancients gathered, especially our forebears in the Hebrew tradition, they would tell their story – they would remember their identity by recalling those who had

gone before them – those who had shaped their lives and guided their choices.

We still maintain this practice of remembering in our liturgy. In the Liturgy of the Word we read our ancient story – first from the Old Testament, then from the New Testament, concluding with Jesus’ story as told through the Gospels. We are not always conscious of this, but in telling the story week after week we are shaped by these words. Our hearts and our minds hear and absorb them so that over time, we begin to act like what we have read and heard. For some of us it takes a long time for the story to sink in.

By telling the story, by remembering those who have gone before us, we remember who we are. We remember that we are a people deeply loved by God; we are a people who endure through hardship and want; we are a people capable of caring for others, capable of the humility that it takes to ask for help when we need it.

Many of us have lost our identity of place. The corporate movement in the second half of the twentieth century has caused many of us to move three or four times in our lives before settling down here. But we still have our identity in God – in this Church – at this Table. That identity never changes, no matter where we move. We take it with us.

As members of Christ's Body we have a duty to maintain our chapter of the story. We have a responsibility to help each other remember our story and pass it on to the next generation. We want them to know who they are -- brothers and sisters of Our Lord, Jesus Christ in the family of God -- a family that extends as far back as the beginning of Creation and that reaches in to eternity.

We must embrace this glorious opportunity, this privilege to be part of such a story. Will our Children remember us; will they know who they are by the remembering?

Whenever our family goes camping, David is fond of quoting his old scout leader, the late Ben Davis. This is an

ethic of scouting, I'm sure. He would say, "Always leave the campsite better than you found it." I think of that quotation often as I consider my ministry at Christ Church. I would like to look back one day and know that I did my part to make this the church it can be.

I know that we can do this together. In a few moments, we will see a visual remembering of this past year and its many changes. And then, we will gather at the Table as we do every week, and join with those who have gone before us in the gift of Eucharist – the gift of Thanksgiving and Remembering. May we never take this granted! May we do all that we can to extend this gift to as many as possible – so that we can remember and be remembered in the memory of God in the communion of all the saints.