

All Saints – All Souls

”thine earthly members fit/To join thy saints above ...”

A long time ago, I sat in the late morning with four or five others in a cold Anglican (C of E) church on the outskirts of London in England.

The priest was seated in a comfortable chair, at the Intercessions desk, in the centre aisle. He had a large pile of old books on a stand beside him.

He was reading slowly, from these books, with pauses after each, of the names of all the people who had died in this Essex parish.

All of them.

England is an old country, and it took many hours, and I stayed only for half an hour. I was young, and the young have so many things to do.

Listening to the names of dead eighteenth century English farmers and their labourers wasn't for an overseas Canadian university student in his mid twenties, a half hour from central London.

I grew up in a little Anglican parish in British Columbia. The priest who established it just before WW1 was still alive, and the people who made up the congregation then were still worshiping in it when I went there for Sunday School in the 1950s.

For many years now on All Saints' Day, I have sat for a half hour or so at my own desk, remembering the founding members of St David's, Celista, in British Columbia.

I see them back then in their Sunday clothes, mostly in couples, the children grown up and moved away...the men retired or nearly retired farmers, loggers, mining prospectors, local store keepers, sawmill workers, and the women mostly homemakers.

The men in dark wool suits, the women in upside-down flower pot hats....

I say their names to myself and place their little farms and acreage houses on the rural back roads in the mountain valleys. I go in my mind up and down those roads, seeing each small old wooden house at the end of its drive.

All of these people are gone now. The farms are retirement properties for city folks my age. The new houses are enormous.

I am like that English priest in the 1970s Essex church seated in his chair at the Intercessions desk, saying the names slowly and aloud of those who came before.

There were so many in his case, and there are just a few in mine.

I understand now the point of remembering the name, even for a few seconds, of an eighteenth-century English farm hand.

This is what Our Lord does. And has always done. And will do.

Thanks be to Him.

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