

## Monastic Scribe V: June 25, 2021

### STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

When I was baptized I was given the names of my two grandfathers – John and Francis. (Yes, I have been known as Timothy since my monastic profession many years ago). This has been a great delight and consolation for me – I have my two elderly grandfathers looking over me as well as Saints John and Francis, my heavenly patrons. (And I added Patrick for my confirmation patron!). It has been the Catholic tradition that a baby needed to be given a Saint's name when baptized – I don't know whether this is still the case. In all events I know that babies are sometimes given the name of some celebrity, or television personality, or just a name that sounds nice. But still, I hope every child finds a person who has gone before them as a connection to a family line. I hope the person learns something about this ancestor and feels a connection with him or her.

The Saints are among those who are our ancestors. In some cultures the reverence for one's ancestors endures. Native Americans are still fighting oil companies who are trying to take over the land where their ancestors are buried. In the monastery it is our practice to read, at the end of supper, the "martyrology" for the next day, that is short summaries of the Saints whose anniversaries are that day. One guest thought it was a bit cute that we were remembering all those dead people! But, as Jesus said, God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and is the God of the living, not the dead. Our ancestors, whether family or saints, are still with us. And we do not pray to them just to get favors or miracles. We pray to them to help us on our way.

The Celts had an intense awareness of the closeness of "the other world." They knew that the deceased were always with us but that at certain times and places, "thin times" and "thin places" our awareness of them is very apparent. I celebrated my father's birthday recently and I really felt his presence that day. I had a good talk with him. Every day, at Mass, as we begin the central Eucharistic prayer, we acclaim "... with all the saints and angels we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy...". We believe that, at the altar of God, all our ancestors are present with us and we are joined with them in the heavenly liturgy. I try to remember, at least some days, that my deceased parents, grandparents, ancestors, as well as my patrons after whom I am named, are all present.

I recommend picking up a copy of the monthly booklet, "Give us This Day." In addition to the prayers and readings for each day, there is a daily page called "Blessed Among Us" written by Robert Ellsberg (who was my editor for my Celtic

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books). He has a synopsis of the life of a Saint connected with that day, whether that “saint” has been canonized or not, whether Catholic or not. We are never alone, either in our prayers or our daily activities. We rejoice in those who have gone before us and who are still present. As the saying goes, we are privileged to stand on the shoulders of giants and are able to live better because of their vision and history. I also recommend the book by James Martin, SJ, “My Life with the Saints.”

If you possibly have a very pretty name but don't know if it relates to anyone. Or if you have a name that certainly doesn't relate to anyone before you. Then find an ancestor who does and strike up a relationship, choose an “imaginary friend” and speak to that person about what is going on in your life.

One of the best Catholic doctrines that I particularly like is called “The Communion of Saints.” We are one with all the flesh and blood people who have lived before us. On November 1st, we have a feast day, called “All Saints Day” to celebrate that oneness. It is so reassuring. The devotion to the Saints in Catholic practice has made our faith real and alive. Yes, some of them were a bit eccentric, but all of them tried their best to do what is pleasing to God and they are loved for that. Saint Ignatius of Loyola was converted to follow Christ through reading lives of the Saints while recovering from a war wound. Why not get to know some of them yourself? The Letter to the Hebrews tells us “...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight... and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” The Saints are our fans cheering us on.

By the way, my nephew named one of his sons, “John Francis” after his Uncle Tim. He delighted in confusing people that way. As for me, I was proud to have someone named after me. Do you have any stories like this? What do you think of the Saints? Drop me a line at [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org) And may the Saints be with you!

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.