

## Monastic Scribe XCVII: November 14, 2025

### SAINTS COME MARCHING IN...

At our monastery we continue an older liturgical custom called the daily reading of the Martyrology. Each evening we have a short resume of a few Saints who have gone before us. The reading ends with saying, "And all others whose anniversary we remember this day." Visitors who join us for supper when this is read, sometimes do not understand the practice. One person asked us why we remember all these dead persons. I smile to myself and say inwardly that these dead people are very much alive, enjoying the joy of the Lord of all the Living.

We Americans don't have many significant ways to deal with death and the remembrance of the deceased, but there are a few such practices. I remember, when I lived in New Orleans, the customs that surrounded All Souls' Day. The city of New Orleans is built below the water level of the nearby sea. Cemeteries are all above ground with ornate mausoleums. When All Souls' Day is near, families dress up the graves, whitewash the structures, and then celebrate with a picnic and often with a Mass on the day itself. Of course there is also the New Orleans jazz funeral. Processions of people ("second liners") follow the jazz band to the cemetery as they play dirges. On the way back they dance and sing joyous songs, including the well-known "When the Saints Come Marching In." Mexico and other countries have the Day of the Dead which has become a carnival type of celebration in honor of the deceased. Disney had a charming film about this, "Coco", about a few years ago.

There are Asians and some of our own indigenous people who honor their ancestors in various rituals of remembrance. These people usually honor their Elders when still alive and then continue this honor after their death. Years ago, Celtic peoples felt the presence of their beloved dead at any time but especially at the new year feast of "Samhain" around November 1st. These people had a vivid sense of the afterlife, pictured the place of rest in Tir na Nog beneath the western sea. An Irish film, "In the West", also pictured this strikingly as well.

For the Celts our ancestors are still always close and may become apparent at certain times and places. They believed that, while they are always near us, their presence becomes more apparent when the veil that separates us from them is dissolved at thin times and thin places. The new year is such a thin time when two years collide.

## Monastic Scribe XCVII: November 14, 2025

The belief in an afterlife for the Hebrews, beyond the shady darkness of Sheol, developed with the later scripture books of Wisdom and the Book of Maccabees. Christianity took this development even further. Moses and Elias appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration. Parables and teachings by Jesus reinforced this belief. This belief was further developed in the early Christian Church and expressed in the prayers of the Mass. The end of the liturgical year, the month of November, was later especially dedicated to pray for the "faithful departed". Today we still daily proclaim, at the "Sanctus" of the Mass, that we are in union with all the angels and saints as we gather around the altar to celebrate the real presence of Jesus Christ himself. We are not alone. We are in communion with all the Saints and ancestors who have gone before us. Christ is present, in the Eucharist, in the Word of Scripture, in the assembly gathered in his name, in the presiding priest, and then in bread and wine. And with him is his body, the church.

Do you ever encounter, not only Jesus, but the saints who have gone before us, as well as your deceased relatives and family members, friends, and some of the faithful departed? I believe the dead are present to us and connect with us in dreams, in memories, in stories. You may have experienced, as I have, a time such as when I was matter of factually talking with my mother as I was driving along. I finally became self-conscious what I was doing but it had not been merely make believe. Family, monastics, friends have come to me in my dreams, not always in their usual familiar setting. I am fortunate to wake up sometimes with some lingering awareness of these appearances.

As in so many aspects of the life of our soul, we must be ready and alert to such visitors. Living in some silence prepares us to hear what is happening in our very depths. Constantly living with radio, computer, social media, Siri or Alexa, keeps one on the periphery of full reality and the presence of others. We are never alone. Conscious awareness of the presence of others in simple stillness allows us to hear them. Busyness of mind and hearing blocks them out.

The mystical awareness of the deceased applies also to how I pray in the person of Christ for all living people in need. Non-Christians pray in God as they believe. In prayer I am one with the people of Gaza, the Ukraine, the hungry in our country and everywhere, the imprisoned, the abused, the hungry and homeless. I can dare to feel their pain and suffering because I am one with Christ and with all the angels and saints. Furthermore, my ancestors are important to me too. I learn from their mistakes and carry on their love. I remember the ways they shone and

## **Monastic Scribe XCVII: November 14, 2025**

the ways they struggled. They are a loving healing presence to me in my daily life. At baptism I was named in memory of my two grandfathers, a connection which I cherish. They are always with me as I pray.

The dominant consciousness of culture tells us that each of us is an isolated individual. I don't believe that. Do you? You can write me at:  
[joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org).

**Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL**

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.