



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

2003

A Special Kind of List

Fr. Randy Roche

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

A Special Kind of List

“The Communion of Saints” is one of many beliefs that Catholics and other Christians refer to in worship services. There is a truth in this formal practice that touches upon something deep within all of us. We naturally keep close to our hearts and our minds some of those who have died. There are very many people whose names are set before us in histories, novels, and even Scriptures. But the names of those we keep in special memory are those we have loved and those who have loved us in ways that we accept and appreciate. We may not keep a written list, we might not be aware of how or why we do it, but we retain unique bonds with some people who have died. We might call the practice our personal “communion of saints.” We do not need the Church to declare “holy” or “blessed” all of those we instinctively recall as being of exceptional goodness in our lives.

These people we spontaneously remember might be family members, teachers, friends, public figures, authors, or even famous entertainers. In our memories of them, we are making no judgments about whether their names should be mentioned in religious services. We continue with them in our lives - remain in communion with them - precisely because they have been, and remain, inspirations for us. I never met Teilhard de Chardin, but I read something he wrote that expressed exactly the reasoned and believable kind of hope that I needed at a time when I feared nuclear destruction was in the world’s immediate future. There are many people like that in my special kind of list. I can easily come to tears of joy when I am suddenly reminded of how someone’s words or presence made a positive difference in my life.

People of widely differing cultural and religious backgrounds have similar experiences. It is not necessary that we all use the same words to describe these ongoing relationships with those who are no longer among us. What is important is to be aware that we do somehow hold on to the good people who have preceded us through death, and let go of those who have for us no helpful connection. There is something of our spirit that affirms and keeps what is good.

We have suffered – sometimes greatly – at the hands of others in an individual or global manner. We remember who they are, and may even come to a point in life where we recognize that we have become better for having dealt with the injustice or hurt they have caused. But we do not treasure or value them. We leave them to God, or to Justice; we do not choose to keep them with us. Those we do gladly recall are those we love and respect. Those who have died and yet remain for us “companions for life” are those whose presence in our memories supports the orientation of our spirits towards a fuller life. They gave to us. In our ongoing relationship they support our efforts to maintain a healthy respect for ourselves and a generous love for others.

We might want to spend a few minutes to call to mind some of those whom we choose to keep with us in our journey through life. It might be surprising to find

that, once a start is made, the process of remembering good people can easily continue for some time. There are many people who have been good to us in ways that did not arise from obligation, but simply kindness and love. For many of us, some on our private "list" also happen to be among those who are praised by the Church as models and examples of love. Mother Teresa is certainly someone that I am glad to remember. From her, I have learned how love of people – simply because they are most in need – is a very real way of finding God present in the world.

While we reflect on what we have received, and how we are encouraged to give in the same way to others, we might imagine how the flow of goodness can continue. We can reasonably hope that, when each of us has finished with this life, we will remain in the minds and hearts of those we have loved as part of their special list. Love does not come to an end.