

Let 'cloud of witnesses' bring inspiration, strength

In these November days, as we look out our windows and walk the streets watching leaves fall against the backdrop of a wet, gray sky, the church reminds us that as Christians we are full of hope. Why, during what might seem a season of gloom, are we full of hope? Because we are never alone.

Gloomy weather can affect our mood — and a gloomy heart can affect the way we view the weather! If one is prone to feelings of loneliness, a gray sky can amplify the sense of being alone. If one is grieving the loss of a loved one, no matter how long ago he or she died, a dreary sky can weigh down the heart and rob precious memories of their ability to bring us joy.

But the Church proclaims to us from the very first day of November,

"Today we keep the festival of your holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother. Around your throne the saints, our brothers and sisters, sing your praise for ever. Their glory fills us with joy, and their communion with us in your Church gives us inspiration and strength" (preface from the solemnity of All Saints).

In the church we are always surrounded with the saints and angels, who cheer us on our journey to God, give us inspirational example, and pray for us.

Safely in God's hands

In "Prayer in Practice," Dominican Father Simon Tugwell writes:

"From this valley of tears, we can already begin to live off the wealth of heaven; we are surrounded and supported by a great cloud of witnesses, and so can undertake to run our course with endurance and without losing heart. And even if we do lose heart, they do not lose heart, even if we are overcome by terror, they are not over-

come by terror, even if we are broken by grief they are not broken by grief; ... we are one with them in Christ, members of one another."

Because the saints see God in his fullness, they know there is no reason to fear. They see directly; we see with the eyes of faith. Though our emotions and the trials of life sometimes make us uneasy or doubtful, it is not the same with them. They hold us up when we falter, lift us up in prayer when we run out of words.

November is also the month when we remember our beloved dead. The church, even as she proclaims the joy and hope of the Resurrection, knows how to grieve and gives us comfort in our celebration of All Souls' Day. Who could not grieve the loss of those we love? When the love is deep, so is the grief. As we think about and pray for our deceased loved ones, we recognize that they are safely in God's loving hands.

Our loved ones who, by God's loving providence, are experiencing purification to prepare them to see him face-to-face, also pray for us! They know they are on their way to heaven, and by whatever means God chooses to prepare them, they are filled with hope. So would they want us to be filled with hope as well.

Pope Benedict XVI, addressing the clergy of Rome in 2008, said:

"Purgatory basically means that God can put the pieces back together

again. That he can cleanse us in such a way that we are able to be with him and can stand there in the fullness of life. Purgatory strips off from one person what is unbearable and from another the inability to bear certain things, so that in each of them a pure heart is revealed, and we can see that we all belong together in one enormous symphony of being."

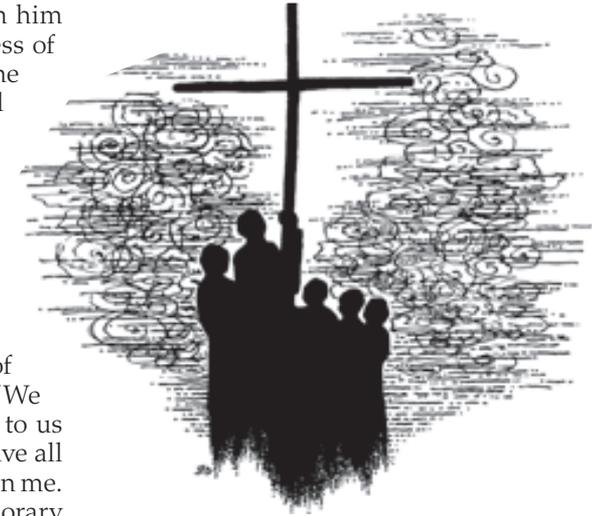
Made for love

Our grieving hearts say to us of our loved ones who have died, "We belong together!" And God says to us in response, "You're right! You have all been made to be together forever in me. My grace is at work in this temporary separation, in this great, mysterious 'symphony of being.' Be at peace and know that your loved ones are safely, hopefully, with me."

In his encyclical "Saved in Hope," the pope reminds us that prayer is the path of communion with God when we feel alone:

"A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me. When I have been plunged into complete solitude ... if I pray I am never totally alone."

We were made to be together; we were made for communion; we were made for love. With every step we take, the Good Shepherd is gathering us in the church and preparing us for that final, perfect communion. In other words, through the church we



are already "in this together." Our seeming separation from loved ones is only temporary, and the final communion for which we are destined will be something beyond words, beyond our capacity to imagine. We and they will all be there together — in God — and every hope will be fulfilled.

Let's allow this month's gray skies to draw us into deep, quiet and grateful reflection on our blessings, the loved ones who have passed through our lives and surround us still, and the God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves — the God who is always waiting with an outstretched hand to both lift us high and pull us deep into his heart, his loving embrace.

DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN'S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at
Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List,
Archdiocese of Seattle,
710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.