

I didn't really know that death was a part of life until a close friend of mine died unexpectedly in my mid 20's. I was a graduate student in LA and had a close group of friends that I spent most of my free time with. One of the couples had just gotten married and we were all in the wedding. After a few weeks apart I was looking forward to our group being back together again.

It was a weekday, and I was preparing for class when I received news that one of these friend's, Praise, had gotten sick and admitted into the hospital. I was wondering how I would fit a hospital visit into my already busy day, or where I should pick up flowers, or maybe there wouldn't even be time, and I'd just wait until she came home, as surely she'd be discharged soon.

Instead, in less than 24 hours since being admitted, to everyone's surprise, Praise died, and in the course of one day, for me, everything changed. Until then, death was a fact of life but not something I really knew to be true in my lived experience. I didn't know how temporary and unpredictable this life is. I didn't know someone so loved and full of life like Praise could be removed from this world so abruptly.

In the days that followed, my perspective shifted. I began seeing how life and death exist together in every single moment, and there is only a very thin veil separating the temporal from eternal, and at any moment anyone—myself included—could slip through it. It was like I had been let in on a secret that I had never known before. It was a sobering new way of seeing the world, and looking back on it, I wonder how could have I missed it?

There is a pattern of life and death in every part of creation. We see it in the seasons of nature, always cycling through birth and life, dying and death, and rebirth, each just as real as the other, each different stages of the same journey, and each even overlapping with other. As a tree is barren in winter another tree is beginning to produce buds, or when someone is dying a baby is also being born. And just as I didn't really know people died until I lost my dear friend Praise, I also didn't know

that while people's spirits can slip through that very thin veil, they can also continue to be a source of support to us here on earth.

Praise's death happened to coincide with my first year attending an Episcopal Church. So just a week after her death, I went to church on All Saints' Day. I was joined by fellow parishioners who had lost and were remembering beloved ordinary saints from their own lives and from the life of our church and from the church universal. I had Praise's name read in the necrology, and while it sounded misplaced and unreal, I was grateful that Praise wasn't alone, and I wasn't alone in my grief. I was surrounded by a supportive community, and together as Christ's collected body we were witnessing one another's losses and coming into closer communion with all the saints both dead and living.

As our collect today says: All the saints—which includes us today and those who have died—have been knit together in one communion through the mystical body Christ, and in another collect we pray— "Grant that in our earthly pilgrimage we may always be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer and know ourselves to be surrounded by their witness".

We are not alone on our earthly pilgrimage, but supported by this fellowship of saints who are alive in our families and friend groups and churches, as well as [those] who have died, but their lifetime of prayers continue to support us, and their memories surround us, and their faithfulness inspires us, and perhaps in a mystical way they are surrounding us now, witnessing everything we go through, and knowing how to intercede intimately and precisely and wisely on our behalf as we navigate our own journeys.

This year on All Saints' Day we are remembering all who have died within our personal lives and church, but we are also reminded that the communion of saints is global and diverse, spanning centuries and continents and people groups, something you may not have thought much about is that there are ordinary saints in

every religion and on all different spiritual paths. They are the people who are faithfully seeking God and committed to virtuous and godly living.

Right now, we are witnessing great suffering in the middle east with the war between Israel and Palestine that began on October 7th: Over 1,500 Israeli deaths, over 9,000 Palestinian deaths including over 2,000 children. And within these numbers are many saints, including faithful Jewish, Muslim, and Christian saints who have suffered and died from this fighting.

In our gospel reading today Jesus' beatitudes describe the attributes of the saints and I can't help but hear them as promises to the saints in this part of the world—

Blessed are you who mourn in Israel and in Palestine, you will be comforted.

Blessed are you in Gaza who physically hunger and thirst for food and water. You will be filled.

Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, longing for justice and safety so you can live virtuous and godly lives. Your soul's desire will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who are merciful, having compassion for innocent people on both sides. You will receive mercy.

Blessed are you peacemakers who are working for understanding and conflict resolution. You will be called children of God.

Blessed are you who are Jewish and Muslim, who are being persecuted by antisemitism and Islamophobia.

And blessed are you who are being persecuted for being born in a certain part of the world. Yours is the kingdom of God.

And I hear these beatitudes calling us to also be saints who long for righteousness, who have compassion and grow peace, who see all people as children of God.

So, this All Saints' Day may you know that you are not alone in any of your grief, or at any point on your pilgrim's journey, but that you are being knit together with the mystical and global communion of saints. May you know that you are surrounded by this supportive community, and together as Christ's collected body, we can witness one another's losses both near and far. We can support one another in prayer and love, and we can come into closer communion with all the saints both dead and living.

Amen.