

Homily/Ritual of Remembrance for All Saints' Day
St. Augustine's Church, Croton-on-Hudson, NY; 11/6/05
The Rev. Betsy Johns Roadman

The person who knows more about saints than anyone else I've ever met is a member of our congregation. Robert Ellsberg, who attends the 10:00 Sunday service, is the editor-in-chief of Orbis Books and has written three books on saints: *All Saints*, *The Saints' Guide to Happiness*, and *Blessed Among All Women: Women Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for our Time*.

Robert writes, in the introduction to *All Saints*:

In the minds of many people today the legends of the saints reflect an all too stereotypical pattern: They spent their lives in prayer and performing good works. Some of them were martyrs. Others founded religious orders. Others had visions or performed miracles ... All this may be true, but it tends to elide a good many issues. While there are recognizable patterns in the lives of the saints, each one was in his or her own way an "original." They achieved their holiness with the material at hand – material, in many cases, of apparently dubious quality. Many of them struggled hard to invent a new style of Christian witness in response to the needs of their time – not infrequently needs obvious to themselves alone...

Describing the function of the saints, Karl Rahner wrote, "They are the initiators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in 'this' way; they make such a type of person believable as a Christian type." The saints are those who, in some partial way, embody – literally incarnate – the challenge of faith in their time and place. In doing so, they open a path that others might follow.

All Saints' Day, designated on the liturgical calendar as November 1, is a principal feast of the church that may be observed on the Sunday following November 1, which is what we're doing today.

In recognition of and in gratitude for our spiritual ancestors whose lives have impacted our own, directly or indirectly, I've designed a ritual of remembrance. Let us be still before God in the next couple of minutes, in the expectation that God will bring the memory of special people to our hearts and minds. Hold those memories there, or, if you'd like, use the pencils and cards in the pews to write down the names as they occur to you. When you're ready, please come forward, light a candle, and place it in the sand in the box at the crossing, in thanksgiving for these extraordinary saints of God in many generations.

(After 2-3 minutes, Betsy starts by lighting a candle; members of the congregation follow. When all who wish to have lit a candle, Betsy concludes with a prayer.)

Let us pray: We bless your holy name, O God, for all your servants who, having finished their course, now rest from their labors. Give us grace to follow the example of their steadfastness and faithfulness, to your honor and glory; through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.