



## GANZ - #11 – REWILDING THE WORD (AUGUST 2024)

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### A Story

**St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)** – “You have enemies. ... Take heed to yourselves: *love them*.<sup>1</sup> In no way can your enemy so hurt you by his or her violence, as you hurt yourself if you love him or her not.”

**W.H. Auden (1907-1973)**, “September 1, 1939”<sup>2</sup> – “I and the public know / What all schoolchildren learn, / Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return.”

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<sup>1</sup> Very often in my life of spiritual conversation with people have I had to explain that Jesus’ *command* (not a suggestion) to “love your enemy” need not, and does not, mean that we are enjoined upon to *like* them. This regular confusing of “loving” and “liking” has significant and regularly damaging effects in the spiritual life of those who are confused about this.

<sup>2</sup> *Wikipedia* - “September 1, 1939” is a poem by W. H. Auden written shortly after the German invasion of Poland, which would mark the start of World War II. It was first published in *The New Republic* issue of 18 October 1939, and in book form in Auden's collection *Another Time* (1940).

**Walter Brueggemann (1933-)** – “The dramatic power of the book of Job attests to the reality that faith, beyond easy convictions, is a demanding way to live that thrives on candor and requires immense courage.”<sup>3</sup>

A few days from now, on August 28<sup>th</sup>, it will be my mom’s birthday, who if she had not gone among our Ancestors in November 2009 would have beheld over ninety candles blazing on the surface of a necessarily large cake. August 28<sup>th</sup> is also the annual feast day of St. Augustine (354-430 CE)<sup>4</sup>, a saint who was the heavenly patron of my home church in Spokane when I was a boy (1954 to 1972). My mother was born on that saint’s annual feast day; my “mother” church<sup>5</sup> was looked after by St. Augustine.

What left the greatest impression on me as a boy in that church was its stained glass windows filled with saints, up at whom I gazed as a boy when, often, my attention wandered from what I was supposed to attend to happening up there in the pulpit or at the altar.

Even though I do not have the capacity to explain how it is true, I know that particular saints choose us; I like to say, they “**adopt**”<sup>6</sup> us. What I have noticed in my life is that five saints, each in turn, and at different points on the timeline of my life, have adopted me.

Has this happened to you?

What I mean is that each of them has given me a special affection for him or her, a more than typical desire to know him or her, to read what they wrote, to study their biographies, to feel a secret joy when I meet a person who has his or her name. I just *care*

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt, [\*An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination\*](#), Third Edition. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 330.

<sup>4</sup> *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* – **Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE)** stands preeminent among the scriptural interpreters of the Western church. He was preeminent among his contemporaries in Late Antiquity for his pastoral commitment as an exegete. He was preeminent in his influence at phase after phase of movements of reform and renewal over a millennium and a half after his death in 430 CE as the invading Vandals besieged the small coastal town of Hippo where he had been bishop for nearly thirty-five years.

<sup>5</sup> “**mother church**” – An expression a Catholic may use to describe the role that his or her parish church played in his or her youth, which was his or her spiritual “home” growing up; the church where the Catholic faith of the parents was developed in their children. The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “Mother Church” – “The Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, considered as a mother in its functions of nourishing and protecting the believer.”

<sup>6</sup> “**adopt**” – The *Oxford English Dictionary*: **1.a. - c1429** – *transitive*. To take (a child) and bring it up as one’s own, (usually) assuming all rights and responsibilities from its biological parents on a permanent, legal basis.

for these (now) five saints more than I do for the others. I am especially proud of them, able to recognize the beauty that they became for the life of the world. They by their own initiative chose to befriend me, and I have trusted them, learned from them, and felt myself “carried” by them. In a certain way, I have been *raised* by them.

How I have accounted for this experience is to point to the Apostles’ Creed<sup>7</sup> where it reads: “I believe in ... the communion<sup>8</sup> of saints” (the original Latin: *Credo in ... sanctorum communionem*). As early as age 6, when St. Thomas the Apostle became the first saint who adopted me, I was beginning to learn not only what the “communion of saints” meant, but also how it *worked*. One theologian has summarized the meaning of that credal statement in this way:

Its fundamental biblical and theological meaning, however, remains locked in the noun communion (*koinonia*). The Church is, first and foremost, a communion, a fellowship called by the Father, in Christ, through the power of the Spirit (Hebrews 2: 14–17; Romans 5: 8–10; 8: 3, 32–35; John 1: 14; and especially 2 Corinthians 13: 13). The “Communion of Saints” means that the Church is a communion of disciples who have been transformed by the grace of Christ. This communion is not broken by death.<sup>9</sup>

And so it has always seemed to me that if this holy communion is not broken by death, then we each ought to learn how to respond when friendship is offered us by these holy “dead” people, learning how to get good at these friendships. (The Night School of the Faber Institute has always been about this.)

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<sup>7</sup> “**creed**” – “Prior to the beginning of the fourth century all creeds and summaries of faith were local in character. It was taken for granted, of course, that they enshrined the universally accepted Catholic faith, handed down from the Apostles. But they owed their immediate authority, no less than their individual stamp, to the liturgy of the local church in which they had emerged.” [J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition. (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 205.] And concerning the **Apostles’ Creed [late 2<sup>nd</sup> century]**: “Next to the Constantinopolitan Creed [of 386 CE], the most important confessional formulary in Christendom is the so-called Apostles’ Creed. Except in Anabaptist circles, its authority was generally recognized at the Reformation, Martin Luther singling it out as one of the three binding summaries of belief, and both Calvin and Zwingli including it among their doctrinal norms. **The English church has given it unusual prominence by requiring its recitation twice daily at morning and evening prayer.**” [J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition. (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 368.]

<sup>8</sup> “**communion**” – The *Oxford English Dictionary*: “ **2.b.** – 1529 – *gen.* Fellowship; the fact of being associated in one's actions or relations; mutual association, society, converse. “.

<sup>9</sup> Fr. Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: New Study Edition* (2013), page 1116.

**A Text** – “For all the Saints” (published 1864) by William Walsham How (1823-1897)<sup>10</sup>

1 **For** all the saints<sup>11</sup> who from their labors rest,  
who Thee by faith before the world confessed;  
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

2 Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;  
Thou, Lord, their **Captain** in the well-fought fight;  
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

3 O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

4 And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

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<sup>10</sup> At *Hymnary.org* we read: **William W. How (b. Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England, 1823; d. Leenane, County Mayo, Ireland, 1897)** studied at Wadham College, Oxford, and Durham University and was ordained in the Church of England in 1847. He served various congregations and became Suffragan Bishop in east London in 1879 and Bishop of Wakefield in 1888. Called both the "poor man's bishop" and "the children's bishop," How was known for his work among the destitute in the London slums and among the factory workers in west Yorkshire. He wrote a number of theological works about controversies surrounding the Oxford Movement and attempted to reconcile biblical creation with the theory of evolution.

I recommend the sung version of this famous hymn by the Benedictine Sisters of Mary, Queen of Apostles, in their album *Martyrs at Ephesus* (2024), “For All the Saints,” musical setting by Ralph Vaughn Williams (1872-1958) and Mother Cecilia Martina Snel.

<sup>11</sup> “**saints**” - Fr. Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: New Study Edition* (2013), page 1109 - “Hardly any practice,” Avery Dulles writes, “is so distinctively Catholic as the cult of the saints” (*The Catholicity of the Church*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 85). There are at least four different meanings of the word *saints*: (1) all those who have been justified [redeemed] by the grace of Christ, whether they be living or dead; (2) those who, having been justified by Christ on earth, have entered into eternal life; (3) particular figures, especially biblical personages, who are examples of holiness; (4) those whom the Church, either through custom or formal canonization, has singled out as members of the Church triumphant so that they may be commemorated in public worship. In the Catholic tradition, all four levels of meaning apply to the term saints.

5 But then there breaks a still more glorious day:  
the saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
the King of glory passes on His way.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

6 From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
in praise of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

### A Close Reading

“**For**” – The hymn begins with a preposition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines this particular application of it: “**III.7.b. - c1275** – In honour of; (chiefly with verbs, and occasionally nouns, of naming or designating) in imitation or memory of, after.” What we are meant to supply is the presence of the author – “I am writing this hymn *for*....” What surprises us is how this hymn apparently in honor of the saints is actually all about honoring Jesus Christ!

**Hebrews 12 (NJB):** <sup>1</sup> With so many witnesses in a great cloud all around us, we too, then, should throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings so closely, and with perseverance keep running in the race which lies ahead of us.\* <sup>2</sup> **Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection:** for the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and *has taken his seat at the right of God’s throne.*\*<sup>12</sup>

“Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.” No saint, ever, imagines that he or she is glorious; he or she most certainly is not the point. Only one is glorious: He whom they imitated, served, for Whom they gave their lives. If you visited the church of St. Augustine in Spokane at night, you would not be able to see the saints in the windows. You can only see them *when the light of day is in them, passing through them*. Those windows make the same point as our hymnist: what a Saint means is *the Light that is in*

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\* Gn 4:7; Ga 5:7d; 2:10; Mt 4:3–11par.; Jn 6:15

\* 2 Co 8:9; Ph 2:6–8; Ps 110:1; Ac 2:33t

<sup>12</sup> [\*The New Jerusalem Bible\*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Heb 12:1–2.

*them, through them, for the life of the world. Consider what Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ wrote about Jesus' mother, Mary, perhaps the greatest<sup>13</sup> of the saints:*

Mary Immaculate,  
Merely a woman, yet  
Whose presence, power is  
Great as no goddess's  
Was deemèd, dreamèd; who  
**This one work has to do –**  
*Let all God's glory through,*  
**God's glory which would go**  
*Through her and from her flow*  
**Off, and no way but so.<sup>14</sup>**

**"Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight"** – The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "captain" in this way: **"II.5.a. – 1567 –** In the army: The officer who commands a company of infantry or foot artillery, or a troop of cavalry or horse artillery, ranking between the major and the lieutenant. The grade is the third in order of promotion." In other words, our resurrected Lord is not a General, directing his or her Army far from the field of battle (I am not putting down the significance of Generals), which is what we might have assumed of Jesus "sitting at the right hand of the Father". No, our Lord is a Captain of "front line soldiers" (infantry, cavalry); He leads from within our ranks.

Thus, we with good reason might interrogate ourselves as to why we expend so much of our energies fighting other battles (for ego, for greater position, for revenge, for esteem in our clique, for what we prefer), following other Captains. Our purpose is to learn how to discern where our true Captain is in the circumstances of our day and hour ... and to give ourselves *there*, with Him. Have we not all felt the dissipation of our powers, the wicking away of our confidence, when we have fought too many battles that have nothing to do with our Captain? It is enough, and a strengthening of us, to join Him in the battles that He identifies as essential (they are fewer, by a lot), alongside of Whom we fight, establishing a Kingdom described by Him in the Beatitudes?

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<sup>13</sup> **"greatest"** – When it comes to the holiness of Heaven, of the Saints, there is something odious about importing our earthly, and especially American, compulsion to rank, to grade people. No Saint in the eyes of God is *greater than*, or the *greatest*. (Though at one time Jesus did speak this way in reference to John the Baptist – "no person born of woman was greater than he.") What I mean here by "perhaps the greatest" acknowledges that I recognize how incomparably proud Jesus was of his mother, knowing how profoundly difficult it likely was to have been His mom.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ – "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe". See: <https://hopkinspoetry.com/poem/the-blessed-virgin/>.

- <sup>3</sup> How blessed<sup>c</sup> are **the poor in spirit**<sup>d</sup>:  
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed are the **gentle**:<sup>e</sup>  
*they shall have the earth as inheritance.\**
- <sup>5</sup> Blessed are those who **mourn**:  
they shall be comforted.\*
- <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for **uprightness**:  
they shall have their fill.\*
- <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the **merciful**:  
they shall have mercy shown them.
- <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the **pure in heart**:  
they shall see God.\*
- <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the **peacemakers**:  
they shall be recognised as children of God.
- <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are **persecuted** in the cause of uprightness:  
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.\* <sup>15</sup>

I recall, in closing, how Abraham Lincoln, elected to the Presidency soon before the outbreak of the American civil war, warned his fellow citizens about the greatest enemy, *ourselves*, about the greatest battle, *within each of us*. He closed his (first) Inaugural Address (4 March 1861; the Civil War began on 12 April 1861) with words that would have fit well in the mouth of Christ:

In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail *you*. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while *I* shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it." I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all

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\* Ps 37:11; Gn 13:15

\* Ps 126:5; Is 61:2-3

\* Is 51:1; Am 8:11-12; Pr 9:5; Si 24:21; Lk 6:36

\* Ex 33:20c; Ps 11:7; 24:3-4; Pr 12:20; Heb 12:14; 1 Jn 3:3

\* 71 P 3:14

<sup>15</sup> [\*The New Jerusalem Bible\*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Mt 5:3-10.

over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

### **An Action**

St. Augustine enjoined upon<sup>16</sup> his people, in a sermon, the cultivation of this habit: "Say the Creed daily. When you rise, when you compose yourself to sleep, repeat your Creed, render it to the Lord, remind yourself of it, be not irked to say it over and over." His point is not the *repetition* of the words; his point is that on any particular day we might find in it something that illuminates the meaning of one of its words or statements. The goal, finally, is for each of us to have lived the Creed, each of its lines, *from the inside* – our own experience, illumined by grace, teaching us what the Creed means. Perhaps we could learn *by heart* (I have always loved this expression) the Apostles' Creed and see about this habit.

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<sup>16</sup> "to enjoin upon" – The *Oxford English Dictionary*: **2.a.** - ?c1225 – In early use: To impose (a penalty, task, duty, or obligation); said *esp.* of a spiritual director (*to enjoin penance*, etc.). Hence in modern use: To prescribe authoritatively and with emphasis (an action, a course of conduct, state of feeling, etc.).