



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the second reading this weekend, we hear how “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). The Church has often seen this as the Communion of Saints. Our belief is that there is that the Church is the Body of Christ (see Rom 12:4-5, I Cor 12:12-27, Gal 1:15-23, Col 1:24). In the Body, we there are three states: The Church Militant (here on earth), the Church Suffering (in Purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (in Heaven). But *it is only one body*. This means we’re still connected. The Church in heaven is rooting for us and helping us along the path to holiness.

Fr. Mike Schmitz (of “The Bible in the Year Podcast” fame) shared this story. After he completed an Ironman competition, there was an announcement that a runner was coming in... but he had only 15 minutes to finish and was two miles out. While running a 7.5-minute mile might be easy when all you have is two miles to run (for those in shape, anyway), this man had already swum 2.4 miles, biked 112 miles, and run all but those 2 miles of a marathon... he would have been exhausted. Everyone in the stands (except Fr. Mike) ran out to meet this man who was coming to the end of the race. Fr. Mike didn’t hold out any hope for him finishing, but at the last minute (literally), he saw the lone runner coming in, followed by this huge crowd shouting encouragement, spurring him on to cross the finish line... and he did just in the nick of time.

That cloud of witnesses behind the runner helped him to cross the finish line. The same thing happens for us in our race to holiness: the saints from Heaven are encouraging us, and spurring us on. They all are as human as we are. They went through the same trials, struggles and temptations that we do. They know what it’s like and they want us to keep going! Too often we look at saints as “plaster statues” ... but they all had to overcome themselves. Many were hardened sinners that God got ahold of and transformed. And He can do the same for you and for me!!

**Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us** (Hebrews 12:1)

We’re not alone, and so we can be encouraged to rid ourselves of the sin that clings to us. Recently, the Lord put on my heart that He had special saints in heaven looking out for me, encouraging me. In this time, He has been encouraging me to greater holiness and to get rid of so many of the things that have distracted me from Him (burdens) and the sin that clings to me. Now when I am tempted to selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-pity, I hear a voice in the back of my mind encouraging me to holiness. Most often it says, “All or nothing,” the motto of Sr. Clare Crockett. In these times, especially in my exhaustion, I am encouraged to keep going, to give my all to God and those around me (*caveat*: I’m not there yet... still working on it, but I see progress!).

The saints are all around us. If we have ears to hear, they are encouraging us along the path toward God. See! We’re not in it alone! Allow God to give you those friends from Heaven to help you live holiness. They may be your name saint, your Confirmation saint, others you’re attracted to, or even loved ones who’ve gone before us into the Kingdom. Ask their help, and they will spur you on!