

## Seeing Deeply

by Marjorie George

There is a concept in photography known as depth of field. It has to do with how much of a photo is in sharp focus. In a narrow depth of field, one object will be in sharp focus while other objects in the background and foreground will be blurred.

Take a photo of children on a playground. If the photo is taken with a narrow depth of field, one particular child will be in sharp focus while all the other children, and the play equipment, and the trees just beyond the playground will be blurred. The point is to bring attention to the one child as all else fades away.

But if a photo is taken with a deep depth of field, everything in the photo will be in focus, at least to the naked eye – the one child and the other children and the play equipment and the trees just beyond the playground. Hence the viewer's eye sees it all.

Good photographers, those who use all the buttons on a digital camera know how to manipulate depth of field. It has to do with the aperture and the f-stop and the shutter speed and the this-button and the that-button (and here we refer you to a Google search for a more complete, and perhaps more accurate, explanation of depth of field).

This little foray into the fine points of photography translates, I think, when we consider All Saints' Day and the Communion of Saints. To understand Communion of Saints, we need a deep depth of field. We need to open up the shutter of our eyes and see what we might not otherwise see.

Come back with me to the playground. Some of those children are my grandchildren, alive in health and happiness. But look over there at the little boy on the swings. That's my cousin who died when he was four. And see that cluster of moms, chatting together with one eye on the playground? My mom is there, watching her children, and her children's children, and her children's children's children. How she loved all of her "kidlies" as she called them. Unto the third and fourth generation. She now enjoys them eternally. And so do I. That's the connection of the Communion of Saints.

It is just these ordinary people, precious to us, whom Paul has in mind when he prays that those who dwell in Christ will know "the riches of [God's] glorious inheritance among the saints" (Ephesians 1:18). Paul's understanding of "saints" as all the holy ones, all those who believe in and partake of Christ's resurrection to eternal life, finds ultimate expression in the concept of the Communion of Saints.

Many of us are accustomed to recognizing saints as dead men and women who, in the words of *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints\**, were "courageous souls who bore witness to Christ's death-defying love in service and holiness of life." And that is true. But the Catechism also teaches that "the Communion of Saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound

together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pg 862).

Mystics often speak of the “thinning of the veil,” a suspension of that tenuous time-space continuum that separates heaven and earth. That gets blurred when the Communion of Saints is the photo in the mind’s eye.

God, who is beyond time and space, has “knit us together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Christ,” says the collect for All Saints’ Day. And the “riches” - to use Paul’s word - are ours to claim across all generations.

This article is adapted from the fall/winter 2010 issue of *Reflections* magazine, published by the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas. The magazine is now out of print.

\**Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints*, is the book of commemorations on the Episcopal Church liturgical calendar. It was adopted by the Episcopal Church in 2009 and is a revision of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.