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Senior Sermon

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When one thinks of a saint, typically what comes to mind is an image of someone who was martyred for their faith or the stained glass heroes in the windows of a church. Those who have died during the past year may also come to mind, as many congregations remember these people on All Saints Day. These holy ones serve as models of faith, but they are not the only believers to make up the body of Christ. All believers in Jesus Christ, both living and dead, are saints. Through the waters of baptism, we too come into the life and death of Christ and are part of the community of saints. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us and makes us holy through the forgiveness of sins with the washing of the water by the Word. Therefore, the community of saints or the cloud of witnesses, as the Hebrews lesson calls it, includes those who have gone before us as well as those who are currently with us, here in this place.

The notion of the body of Christ, however, is bigger than our congregation, denomination, or nation. The reading from Revelation tells of a great multitude before the throne of God. The people come from many nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. The communion of saints includes the whole Christian church on earth and in heaven.

As a music major, I cannot help but reflect on what implications this has on church music. The church's song belongs to no one people. We can appreciate the music our brothers and sisters in Christ use in other countries for their worship services. Incorporating this music into our own worship can provide deep enrichment. Chants from Taizé, African hymns, rhythmic Latino music, and Asian hymns are just a few of the rich resources we have to draw upon. The opening hymn we sang this morning, the music for which was written by the great English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, is another example. It is interesting to note that the hymn tune name is Sine Nomine, Latin for "without a name." This reminds us that we rejoice with

saints both known and unknown, and can incorporate music both familiar and unfamiliar to us in worship.

Just as the church's song belongs to no one people, it also belongs to no one time. We can appreciate music from the saints of the past as well as those of the present. Quality worship music does not have an expiration date like a gallon of milk. We can appreciate our rich musical heritage while adding to it music from our generation. If music in worship services is only from the twentieth century or only from before then, are we truly giving witness to the communion of saints? It is easy to get caught up in the "hubris of the present moment," thinking that our music and generation is superior to those who have gone before us. We fail to see that, "future generations will find distortions and absurdities in our values, practices, and inventions that never occurred to us," to quote an article by Thomas H. Troeger, chaplain for the American Guild of Organists and professor at Yale Divinity School and Institute of Sacred Music. To help overcome this, we celebrate those who have gone before us to give us a sense of interconnectedness. Instead of looking down on the past, we harmonize and "make music with the past." Professor Troeger states that through music making, we give witness to the great cloud of the faithful through the ages, and thereby lift people above the hubris of the present moment. I challenge us all to remember this not only on All Saints Day but always, so that we might in fact sing with *all* the saints. Amen.