

Gospel Connection

NOVEMBER 1, 2020: Solemnity of All Saints

“Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . they who mourn . . . the meek . . . they who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . the merciful . . . the clean of heart . . . the peacemakers . . . they who are persecuted for the sake of justice . . .”

Matthew 5: 1-12a

A litany of saints

The COVID-19 pandemic is most frequently portrayed in numbers: the number of new cases a day, the number of hospitalizations, the number of deaths.

But some of us know all too painfully that every one of those numbers is a human being: someone who loved and was loved, someone whose life was a story worth telling and remembering.

A new Twitter feed has been set up to tell those stories.

@FacesofCovid combs newspapers — from **The New York Times** to small-town weeklies — collecting the stories of the more than 200,000 Americans who have died of the coronavirus. It reads like a litany of saints:

Margaret, the loving mother and grandmother, remembered by family and friends for her selflessness and generosity.

Wendell, the beloved school bus driver, known for his limitless good humor and care for every child on his bus.

Reva, 86, who dropped out of high school to care for her younger brothers and sisters, then returned to school later in life and would go on to be an educator herself, helping others to complete their GED.

Rebecca, an infectious-disease specialist who helped other physicians deal with COVID-19 as well as treating hundreds of her own patients before succumbing to the virus herself.

Michael, a 33-year veteran volunteer firefighter and EMT in his community who died after contracting COVID-19 during a response to a residence where the patient had a known case of the virus.

Ashlee, 34, a middle-school special-ed teacher, adored by her students, who was known to use her own money to pay for whatever a student needed, from school supplies to clothes.

Cheryl, 60, who impacted countless lives in her long career as an ICU nurse.

Tyler, 29, a husband, dad and youth hockey coach.

Maria, 63, known as the “mother” of the emergency room where she worked as head nurse. One of her four adult daughters — all of whom are nurses — said of her mom, “She showed me how to be selfless.”

Ali, 59, a former boxer and respected trainer who joined his son to make a downtown gym a safe haven for kids for families at risk.

@FacesofCovid is the work of Alex Goldstein, a communications company executive. “I think it is very easy in moments like this to allow ourselves to become numb to the statistics and not see the faces that are behind these numbers.”

It was the death of 9/11 first responder Anthony Iraci of New York who died of the virus that inspired **@FacesofCovid**.

“He had a weakened immune system and compromised respiratory system because of his response to 9/11, which made him much more susceptible to COVID-19. That was a lot,” Goldstein explained.

@FacesOfCOVID has been up and running on Twitter since the end of March. With the help of his friend Scott Zoback, Goldstein spends some time each day scouring the websites of about 40 top regional newspapers across the country. They read every story so they can add a thread about the individual’s life — and how family and community were blessed by his or her presence.

Their work is a “litany of saints” for this difficult time.

[**Fast Company**, April 10, 2020; **The Boston Globe**, May 12, 2020.]

Today we celebrate the feast of all the saints — not just the “official” saints like the Elizabeth Setons and the Francises and the Thomas Mores and the Mother Teresas — but the saints we have known and who have lived among us, the “blessed” of the Gospel through whom God touches us and our world. Today we honor the holy men and women who have walked among us and who have touched our lives by the example of their humility and selflessness, their generosity and compassion. Let us remember with gratitude today the blessings they have been to us; may the lives of our own “litany of saints” inspire us to follow the example of their grace-filled lives so that, one day, we may join their company in the dwelling place of God.