

All Saints Day 2023—the Dash of our Lives*

All Saints', Brooklyn

All Saints', Detroit

St. Matthew and St. Joseph

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Good Morning!

Our lives are but a hyphen—or a dash.

If you think about it. It goes something like this on the tombstone—on the marker at the grave: Bonnie A. Perry –born April 15, 1962, dash died—date not yet known sometime in the future.

It's the dash—the hyphen—the space and time in between when we came into this world and when we will leave it. It is the dash that matters. It is the dash that is our lives. It is the dash of so many people's lives that we remember and memorialize this morning. All these lives, all of these people who have touched, shaped and formed us.

It is the dash of their existence that we remember and honor today. On this most Holy Sacred day—All Saints' Day-- where death and new life are intertwined, interwoven, mingled with mist and care.

I remember my grandmother, Genevieve—or to her friends—Jeannie. Beautiful white hair, a laugh that filled a room even when she was 80. She adored her grandchildren, all 18 of us—loved her four girls. Made the most amazing Parker House rolls and crescent cookies. She loved a good scotch, frequently imbibed as she and my grandfather, PopPop, sat and watched a round of golf on television. At her 80th birthday party, she danced on a chair, because her grandkids asked her too. We made sure she was safe, and truth be told she never did anything she really didn't want to. I was raised Roman Catholic, so right out of seminary as I switched to the Episcopal church, my parents at first, wouldn't receive communion when they went to Eucharist at the churches where I served. Grandma visited one weekend. Came to church with me, and at communion proudly marched herself up to communion rail and held out her hands to me as I came by with the hosts.

Later when I asked how come she received, "She rolled her eyes and said, seems to me it's the same God and I was here." Doctrine would never supersede relationships for her. She was an amazing woman, a blessing to my life, she loved me and she taught me, to always be who I am. Hiding, pretending, well life isn't long enough to not be who God is calling us to be. The dash of her life changed my life.

All Saints' Day—when we remember. All the Saints. This day we remember. Who for you--- has touched your soul? Whose "dash" in their life, the period between when they were born and when they died—whose dash has changed you? Who has gone before us, no longer with us in the mortal world, who loved you, and helped shape and form you? Who do you miss so much, that your heart aches and your soul cries?

I called John and Carolyn Messimer the other day, because I was thinking about them as I make a visit to All Saints' Church in Brooklyn, Michigan. I was thinking of their youngest child, Andrea. Who died on December 28th this past year. She was 50 years old. A woman by all accounts who was a force of nature. Someone who knew how to bring people together and bind them, and form a cohesive community, be the mortar holds together beautiful bricks in a wall.

Andrea's ability in her industry, getting the word out, on ALL of those billboards we drive past was legendary. According to the people at Pepsi, Budweiser and countless other clients, no one understood the medium like Andrea did. Kind of makes sense when you think about it—she was so good and bringing people together, creating community and care, it makes sense that she could use that platform for other people to see something, read something and be swayed and directed. Community, with her "brat packs" and roadside travels, all those signs AT HOME OUTDOOR, that was Andrea. [We see her love and vital energy in the picture on the altar.]

Her sudden, unexpected death shocked everyone. How it came to be, I don't think any of us will truly ever understand. I think only Andrea could explain, but even for her, it seems words weren't enough. So instead, we are left, with our memories and wounded hearts. But what I say to you, and to all of us, who have holes in our souls left by loved ones gone: As Christians we have a belief about this.

For when we die, we know that life has changed but not ended. We know that God has promised from the beginning of time to be with us always, God's promise and God's presence does not end with death, for just as we share in Christ's baptism, so shall we share in his resurrection.

So Friends, even at the Grave we make our song, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

On this day we remember our loved ones: The dash of their lives, touching us, shaping us, and making us more of who we are. We remember them, none perfect, all human. All the Saints.

Amen.