



Cloud source

by Kimiko Karpoff

When I imagine the Cloud of Witnesses, I often think of it in terms of those who went before me and are spiritually keeping watch on us now. This can be both comforting and disconcerting. It's the disconcert that I feel more often, as if I'm being judged against a standard and a people who I can't possibly live up to.

In my mind the people who have forged the path and become my Cloud are impossibly amazing. Courageous and wise women and men who have stood against injustice, kicked down doors of inequity, seen a way through intractable odds or just sat firm and calm in the face of sure oppression and the physical and emotional violence used against them and others.

I've saintified the Cloud of Witnesses.

As a diaconal ministry student, in the year focussed on Social Ministry, I remember moments of feeling hugely inadequate. Notwithstanding that at the time I was running a large outreach ministry whose vision was in a large part my vision and whose success

came in many ways through my work and connections. Not only did we support a lot of people in the community, but we did it by building partnerships, and encouraging and inviting the gifts of people who came to us because of need, so that truly the whole community was involved. The model inspired many people and I was often asked to come talk about it with other organizations and communities. I felt, in some ways, like a fraud. Compared to Dorothy Day who committed her whole life to the Catholic Worker Movement, I was a mere dabbler. However, even Dorothy Day herself famously said “Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily.”

The Cloud of Witnesses is, of course, not just made up of famous activists. In fact mostly not. My grandmother, Florence, is part of my Cloud. A deaconess, she said that one of the few times she knew she had made a difference in someone's life was for an elderly woman who lived near-by when she was a young mother. Grandmother would go there in the mid-morning under the pretext of needing a break and make tea and sandwiches for the two of them. Years later the woman's children told her how important those visits were to their mother who knew that in reality my grandmother was ensuring that she got both human contact and something to eat. Our Cloud of Witnesses is substantially rather ordinary people who have, in large and small ways, chosen to say Yes to God's Kingdom here on earth. Some of these people would not use religious language, none-the-less their actions are of Love and Goodness.

And, the Cloud is much bigger and broader. The Witnesses also include teachers and pray-ers and people whose very oppression prevented them from standing firm in the face of power, or who did and were crushed by it. The Cloud is also comprised of the generations of people who follow us, and the ecological systems in which we all live.

I am kept humble by my Cloud of Witnesses who in different ways hold me accountable. I am aware that people have both joyfully given and sacrificed much for me to be where I am today. And I am aware that my choices and actions will shape lives and the world that will be here long after I am gone from it.

In other words, I am aware that I am also part of the Cloud, a small drop in the whole of that amorphous thing that at times looks down on us, at times surrounds us and really is us. Clouds are water carriers, life-bringers, thanks be to God. May it be so for us.

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