

Solemnity of All Saints  
Revelation 7: 2-4, 9-14  
Psalm 24: 1BC-2, 3-4AB, 5-6  
1 John 3: 1-3  
Matthew 5: 1-12A  
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Many people, these days, are interested in tracing their ancestry. Genealogy is a popular hobby. Elderly relatives are surprised to find themselves objects of unprecedented attention, as enthusiasts urge them to scour their fading memories for recollections of long-lost aunts, and half-forgotten second cousins. Hobbyists travel long distances, and spend countless hours ploughing through baptismal and other records, trying to uncover the roots of their family trees.

Some people take the project very seriously. None more so than the aristocratic de Levis family of France. They were convinced that theirs was the oldest family in Christendom. Two paintings in the family chateau supported their claim. One was said to depict Noah boarding the Ark with a box of the Levis papers under his arm. The other portrayed the Virgin Mary greeting the founder of the Levis family as cousin, and inviting him to put his hat back on.

But even if we lack the Levis family's pretensions, most of us can still enjoy spending an occasional hour sorting through old family photographs, wondering who that is lurking in the shadow cast by great-grandma's Christmas tree, or whose face is half-hidden behind the black and white birthday cake. We can remark that young John looks just like his grandfather did when he was his age. We can admit ruefully that we have inherited the family nose, or insist that some other family member is

the unhappy possessor of Aunt Rose's ears.

To an outsider, the photographs might seem like countless variations of the same silly face, recorded in both sexes, at all ages, and in the costumes of several times and places. But to us they can mean more. They can give perspective to our own lives: our joys and sorrows, our struggles and hopes. They can help us to discern our place in the scheme of things. They can even offer inspiration.

This is the feast of All Saints. Today we celebrate the fact that all of us, even if we have no photographs, or no knowledge of our forbears, are members, in Christ, of a great family. It's a family as ancient and august as God's love for humanity. The family is described by Jesus in the Gospel. It comprises the poor, the sorrowing, the single-hearted and the merciful. It includes those who strive for peace or yearn for holiness.

And just as we can perceive something of ourselves in old family photographs, we ought to be able to recognize aspects of ourselves in Jesus' words. Rather than distinctive eyes, or a characteristically receding hairline, we might discover in ourselves a bit of St. Joan of Arc's courage, some of St. Francis' love of creation, a trace of St. Augustine's repentance, or a little of the compassion of St. Vincent de Paul. These are all traits that are known to run in the family.

So, reflecting upon the lives of the saints can give us insight into the gifts God has given us. They can inspire us, and give us a profound sense of belonging. And if we should happen to run into a Levis, we could let it slip that Our Lady, and Noah too, are members of our family.