

Faith In Practice

Life Changing Medical Mission



Cloud of Witnesses

For me, All Saints' Day is one of the most sacred days of the year. On this day, I set aside some space, some sacred time, to give God thanks for the saints in my life. I listen for their whispers as I wander through my past remembering those nearest to my heart, many who never realized I was watching them. Those who formed my journey of faith as I watched them live out theirs. I give God thanks for them, because in their faces, I have seen the face of God.

I know that they, my own personal cloud of witnesses, remain with me still, continuing to guide and embolden me through the example of their lives. So, on this day, as I draw them close, I promise that I will do my best to honor their witness to God's love. I promise that I will listen more intently to God's call and to follow as they did. *Because they did.*

I am writing this reflection from Antigua, Guatemala. Maybe it is because I am here that Padre José Contran is so very present to me on this All Saint's Day. The last time I saw Padre José was in November 2019, shortly before his death. On that visit, I knelt at his bedside as he spoke to Jesus. In those sacred moments, he asked Jesus, his Lord, to open the gates of heaven so that he might pass through. So that he might come home. I will never forget how this humble Franciscan priest spoke in such an intimate and familiar way. I knew then, and now, that this was not because he was on the threshold of death, but because this was how he always spoke to his Lord. I simply was privileged to be present to witness the conversation.

According to his wish, Padre José now lies in the back corner of the Antigua Cemetery among his little children, those who had lived and died at the Obras during his more than 25 years as its director. Those who the world had abandoned, but for him were family. Many had wanted to enshrine Padre José at the grand San Francisco Church, but he would hear nothing of it. He would follow his Lord to the very end. Padre José, his very last act on earth, was a witness to God's love in the name of Jesus, his Lord.

I will never be a Padre José Contran. But I do know that I am a better person for having witnessed how he lived his faith. How he walked humbly with his God every day of his life. So, among my saints, I am giving thanks especially for Padre José Contran on this All Saint's Day. The simple priest who showed me, who has shown so many of us, what a life lived close to the heart of Jesus looks like.

I know you are receiving this reflection a few days after All Saint's Day, but I hope you might take a moment, a sacred moment, to listen for the voices of your own personal cloud of witnesses and to thank God for them. They through whom you have seen the face of God.

And, together, might we rededicate our lives to listening for God's call to us this day and to follow in memory of those who have laid the path before us. Those who showed us the way, who show us the way still.

All to God's honor, glory, and praise.

Rev. Linda L. McCarty
President & CEO



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