

Grace Filter

Hebrews 12:1, Revelation 21: Selected Phrases, Romans 8:38-39

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Prayer for Understanding We are grateful, O God, for those who taught us, by their example, their courage and faith, how to love. We are grateful that they are part of the great cloud of witnesses who surround us and continue to sustain us. Now speak your word of comfort and challenge to us. Amen

Our life is significantly improved by filters. On the dairy farm, every drop of milk went through a filter that we changed twice a day. Our vehicles keep running properly because of air and oil filters. HVAC systems purify our air. Often water filters purify our beverages. We are improving filters to desalinate ocean water. Probably a few of our members have worked on filtration systems at 3M. Recently, many of us are wearing masks to filter coronavirus. Filters are fun when used with photos or sunglasses to enjoy activities on bright days. Life is sustained by natural filters. Soil filters water. The atmosphere filters ultraviolet radiation. Trees filter pollutants out of the air. Our kidneys and liver filter our blood. Our lungs filter oxygen. Our stomach and intestines filter nutrients. Our skin filters out infections. Filters remove impurities and unwanted material yielding purity. All these filters pale in comparison to the grandest filter, the grace filter.

Every moment of our life the resurrected cheer us on from heaven. They perceive every goodness, love, joy, celebration, and accomplishment. The grace filter removes every mistake, tear, longing, sin, and sadness, for there is only love, joy, celebration, and glory in heaven. God chooses to see us on earth through the grace filter. At earthly death, grace perfects us, then we soar with our eternal resurrection body.

Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday. The saints in heaven at resurrection were perfected by the grace filter. In addition, everyone on earth is a saint by the grace filter.

God calls us to change, transform, grow, develop into perfect people. We are to strive to become today the perfect person we will become by the grace filter at resurrection. The church word for this is sanctification. Often an effective way to filter yourself, to purify and sanctify yourself, is by identifying your faults, bad habits, and sin and replacing them with loving, joyful thoughts, and actions. This process is called repentance, turning from one way of life, turning to another way of life. Often, we need the support of family, friends, counselors, and professionals to guide, encourage, and support us.

Similarly, God calls us to transform into a perfect worldwide, harmonious community. The community is perfect for everyone belongs, is equal and joyfully shares their unique gifts. We are called to identify and gracefully filter out every form of hate, fear, arrogance, violence, oppression, ism, darkness, and greed.

A wonderful opportunity for us is to perceive the world through the grace filter, the way all of heaven sees the world. Celebrate goodness. Delight in wonder. Dance with joy. Savor love.

A wonderful opportunity is for you to perceive yourself through the grace filter, the way all of heaven sees you. Celebrating your talents, gifts, and abilities. Delighting in your ever expanding, eternal love, joy, and goodness.

Some of the people in heaven have hurt you. At resurrection they were perfected by the grace filter. You will spend eternity with them in their perfected being. If you have not already, now is a good time to work on forgiving them and letting go of the baggage of your injury.

In Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, the main character, Eddie, a maintenance man at an amusement park, dies in an accident, ending a modest life in which, he felt trapped. He then goes to heaven and meets five people who show him how mysteriously but profoundly his life was intertwined with the lives of others, some of whom he did not even know at all and some he knew intimately. One of these people is his own father from whom he was alienated by a lifetime of neglect, occasional violence, and finally a terrible silence. When his father, drunk, raised a fist to strike him, Eddie, a strong young man, fought back. His father simply stopped talking to him. But Eddie never stopped wanting, needing his father's love. Neither man ever broke the silence. In heaven, Eddie learns why his father was the way he was, learns about his father's courage and loyalty, and finally learns about his father's love.

Pastor John Buchanan comments, "Albom is no theologian, but that is part of what the notion of the Communion of Saints is about. Relationships do not end with death. For some it is important and healing to keep on

working on unresolved issues, unresolved conflict, learning to accept and forgive and reconcile with a parent, a child, a friend. The Communion of Saints is an attempt to put words to the reality that we are not alone. We are surrounded by the loving presence God who created us and the loving, encouraging presence of all those who have gone before us. The final mystery of our faith, for which we stretch to find words big enough, is that nothing of love is ever lost. We can, with confidence, entrust those who were and are dear to us to God's love. The final mystery of our faith is that you and I are surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses.

Hebrews proclaims. **Hebrews 12:1** **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."**

We are never alone. We are always embraced by the loving presence of God. And we are surrounded by the loving presence of all the resurrected in heaven, the communion of saints. Those who have gone before us are with us. Their love is imprinted in our being, their joy is woven into our soul, their delight is mingled in our thoughts. The resurrected are on the balcony of heaven, with God, cheering for you.

The Holy Spirit unites all people across time and space. You are surrounded by the great cloud of witness in heaven and saints on earth. The communion of saints is all people on earth and in heaven, all filtered by grace, all loving you, all cheering for you.

Pastor Dana Ferguson upon graduation gave her parents a plaque that read, "I am because of my parent's love." She said, "It is true, yet it is only part of the story. I am because of the love of many and because of the love of God."

Joan Chittister wrote, "We do not do it alone of course. We are championed through life. . . .Underneath it all, holding us up as we change, are the people who love us. However, much we find ourselves in the throes of life, they stand by until we land again on solid ground, find ourselves again, get up in the morning ready to start over. Because of them we stay on the path. They provide the unchanging foundations of love that enable us to risk change. The people who love us prod us—enable us—to grow. And God loves us. . . . God loves me and wants me to grow. I am trying, before I die, to learn to trust this continual going into the unknown."

Upon the death of his mother, Henri Nouwen wrote a book, *The Greatest Gift*. Henri wrote, "When we can reach beyond our fears to God who loves us with a love that was there before we were born and will be there after we die; then oppression, persecution, even death will be unable to take our freedom. Once we have come to the deep inner knowledge—a knowledge more of heart than of mind—that we are born out of love and will die into love, that this love is our true Mother and Father, then all forms of evil, illness, and death lose their final power over us."

We are born out of love and die into love. The dead die into love that endures forever, to be savored and enjoyed forever. In the end is our beginning. **Revelation 21:Select Phrases. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. "Look, God's home is now among God's people! God will live with them, and they will be God's people. God will be with them. God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." "Look, I am making everything new!" I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End."**

Multitudes of people have gone before us, faced the darkness, struggled with enemies—real and internal—doubted and questioned, even Jesus voiced it terribly and eloquently as he died on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" They all struggled and are all here for us, cheering for us, encouraging us. They are all here with you now. We are surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses.

Nothing of love is ever lost. Our relationship with those who have died and gone before changes. It does not end, because nothing of love is ever lost. It simply moves to a new dimension where one day we will all be reunited.

Even in the deepest sorrow, the thickest darkness the light of the love of the saints and God guide us. Coronavirus has no influence upon the communion of saints. One may be in quarantine, or isolation, and nothing can separate us from God's love and the love of all your saints. The Apostle Paul wrote, **Romans 8:38-39** **"I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Therefore, nothing will be able to separate you from the great crowd of witnesses. Nothing can separate you from those who love you that died and are now in heaven. They are all here with you right now.

The love of the resurrected are imprinted in every fiber of our being. We have a basic human need to remember those who are resurrected, to celebrate their life and to dream about our reunion.

All Saints Day is a celebration to remember and thank those who lived, died, and are resurrected. Your personal saints, the ones who love you, and the ones before them whose love lived in them and came to you. Your saints, the ones whose love inspires you.

We are surrounded by all those who prepared the way for us. This church is surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, those who sat in this building, and preceding buildings. Surrounded by those who played music, sang, taught, and served. Our Communion of Saints. We are surrounded by the members of this church who entered Life Triumphant in the last year. Samuel Atu-Tetuh, Roy Brogren, Bobbie Wetz, Donna Clevenger, Ruth Bullis, Bill Paddock, Marty Ginn, Del Nelson, Kathryn Hill.

We are surrounded by everyone who has ever lived. Everyone's life has been filtered by grace. In perfect purity, they are cheering for us. Spend time today talking and listening to your saints in heaven. They are present in our lives. Often people tell me they sense those in heaven as they partake of Holy Communion. Others say things like a particular saint would love this, love the new child, the family gathering, the celebration. I would suggest that it is more accurate to say, "a particular saint is loving this" for they are in heaven and with you. Sometimes as the years go by, we know and understand more of the love of our parents and grandparents. They are with you now and will be with you always.

My family reveals love through food, so certain foods reveal the loving presence of my saints in heaven. A fig cookie reveals the smile of my grandmother and the gleam in her eye as she listened to me. My grandmother regularly mailed me fig cookies when we moved away. My grandfather would invite me to help him with chores and thank me with a cube of caramel he always had ready for me in his pocket. My mom's parents lived in Florida. They sent us sweet oranges, grandmother is sweet, and tart grapefruit, grandfather taught me to be strong and resolute. My mother made lemon meringue pie to celebrate special occasions. My dad's steady love and wisdom is revealed by oatmeal, the food he ate almost every day. How do your saints reveal their love to you? Perhaps art, music, special places, traditions, games. Your saints are communicating with you. Your saints are delighting in you. Amen