

The time between Halloween and the feast of All Saints and All Souls is particularly stretchy. We often end up celebrating the eve of these days, Halloween, one weekend, and the actual feasts the next. All Saints and All Souls fall Nov. 1 and Nov. 2 respectively on the calendar, but they really celebrate the same idea – that faithful people, living and dead, great and small, are with both with God and us right now. And they have no small impact.

On Wednesday, the Feast of All Souls, we found ourselves telling stories of these heroes large and small during our morning Eucharist. The names of family members and past parishioners came up. Someone would say a name and faces would light up, people would exclaim and affirm. It was fun to watch the tinder of remembrance catch – as a newcomer, I have only the stories of some of the greats of both St. Peter's and St. Philip's to go by.

But on these feasts, that's largely what we have – the stories to go by. These are feasts designed for storytelling, for remembering in a way that makes things present to us now. After the liturgy I encourage you to take a look at the pictures that people have brought in, and to learn about them. Be sure to ask Jeanne Robson, for examples, about the names of the cloud of witnesses from St. Peter's that she lovingly displayed on the black trifold over there.

And as I preach at every funeral, we are not celebrating lives that were, but lives that are – present, with us today, as near to us as God is.

So I wanted to share just one of those stories with you, about the woman who is one of my great influencers – the Rev. Pauli Murray. This is her icon right here.

As a gift for my ordination to the transitional diaconate in June of 2019, my dear friend the Rev. Carole Duncan, a vocational deacon, commissioned this icon from local artist Bettina Clowney, who is now among the saints in light. Bettina was my spiritual director at the time.

When we are doing anti-racism work at St. Martin's, this icon would sit on a special stand during our workshops, to remind us of the force and power of the saints who stand on the side of door with God, in the realm of God's NOW.

I was introduced to the details of the Rev. Pauli Murray's life just the year before, when my husband gave me her autobiography "Song in a Weary Throat" for Christmas. In her story I found a mentor for regarding my own life, for making some sense of my long, 25-year-walk toward priesthood.

From her birth in 1910 to her death in 1985 Pauli Murray embodied the insistent hope that we find described in Luke's beatitudes from today's Gospel. I don't see Luke's beatitudes as future promises or heavenly rewards for faithful suffering. I see them as the doorway that stands between God's now and our not yet. **God's Now and our Not Yet.** That's the reverse of how we tend to think about God, isn't it? We tend to ask God for things like justice and wellbeing now –

for financial stability, for enough to eat, for dignity -- now -- and we assume that it's God who is saying in return – not yet.

What if we imagined instead a God who wills these good gifts for the creation now, and who waits for humanity to open the door to that divine vision, for the day when we'll stop saying "Not Yet, God"?

What if the work of the saint is to help us walk through that door, from our Not Yet into God's Now?

Pauli Murray did this by pushing against every obstacle, every prejudice, that stood between the life available to her as an African American woman and the person that God created her to be : a poet, a lawyer, a change agent, an academic and at the end of her life an Episcopal Priest – the first African American woman priest in our denomination. In each of these identities, she ran up against the Not Yet of our society. In each of these, God's Now beckoned her from the other side.

And so as a black woman coming of age in the Great Depression, Pauli Murray found herself at the threshold of every change our country saw in Civil Rights and Women's rights in the mid-20th century. I firmly believe that those justice movements, still in progress, are God's desire Now for the world.

Murray called the twin inequalities of racism and sexism. Jim Crow and Jane Crow. Her legal strategies, developed in law school, were used to help overturn the separate but equal clause in the Supreme Court. As a civil rights warrior, she occupied all-white bus seats and segregated lunch counters more than a decade before Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King led similar efforts. And speaking of God's NOW, she co-founded the National Organization of Women.

Toward the end of her life she was in the first official class of women to be ordained to the Episcopal Priesthood, right on the heels of those renegade women and bishops who successfully pushed against the church's Not Yet when it came to women's ordination. Which happened right here in Philadelphia.

Pauli Murray wrote several autobiographical works, but she barely had words to discuss the contours of her sexual identity and her gender in them. Today she would have been much more free to understand herself as trans-gender, to identify as male, something only hinted at in her writing, and discovered more concretely in her private papers. That's one more area that the door to God's NOW has swung open to in response to something longed-for in Pauli Murray's personal identity.

Pauli said NOW to those things, with a bone shaking force. And while Not Yet was often the prevailing answer, she put her shoulder against the door, along with so many others, while looking for other weaknesses in the structure.

And that's why I also have a very personal reason for turning to Pauli Murray to be my roll model, my intercessor and witness. I call her the patron saint of my priesthood.

In 1994 I had recently left my first career in journalism in order to enter lay ministry in the Catholic Church. I was working on a Catholic Newspaper in Cleveland and beginning my master's studies in Pastoral Ministry. That May the Vatican released a letter saying that the church's teaching prohibiting the ordination of women was to be considered essentially infallible, and could not be questioned or discussed by the faithful. It was a body-blow to all of us who were entering ministry and struggling with the magisterium's views on women.

At the time, my bishop had just been named the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and he had to make a public statement aimed at all of us across the country who were raising objections.

"I ask you now prayerfully to allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with the wisdom and understanding that will enable you to accept it," he said.

So I wrote a letter to the bishop, who is also now with the saints in light, letting him know what such a prayer felt like for a women in Catholic ministry. "I've never been asked to pray a prayer that makes me sick to my stomach," I said. I wish you knew what it feels like to be a woman in the church and to be told not to speak, not to discuss, only to pray for acceptance, I said. If the church were ordaining women I'd be in line, I said.

That was the first time I named my call to the priesthood – to myself, let alone the bishop. And for many years I would struggle with whether it was a call to stay until the Church changed its teachings or to leave and be a priest outside of the faith tradition that had shaped me. Was it the call of NOW or of Not Yet?

So for 15 years I worked for change from the inside, until the Spirit, with the assistance of my family, friends and spiritual guides, indicated it was time for me to go, and to follow my call down the street to St Andrew's Episcopal Church in State College, where I was received as an Episcopalian in 2010.

Eight years ago she led me to Philadelphia and to St. Martin's, where the words The Holy Spirit put in my mouth 25 years before, like an ember on the tongue, could finally be heard, and received -- and tested -- as a call to ordination should be.

And the Holy Spirit led me to Pauli Murray, a touch-stone, a role model, a reminder of the work of pushing and pushing against the door between our Not Yet and God' Now.

When I can look into the eyes of Pauli Murray, so beautifully written in this icon, I find strength for my own impatient soul. Her life as an African American woman ever opens my eyes to the Not Yet to which my formation as a white person has often blinded me. Her witness points me to where the door to God's NOW lies. Her priesthood shows me where to put my shoulder.

And on those days when the door seems impossibly stuck, I can look into those wise and weary eyes and know that St. Pauli Murray is praying for me.

Amen.