

Photography and the Saints

One of the best things about our Catholic faith is the gift and example of the saints. We have so many saints to look to for inspiration: and all kinds of “patron saints” as we call them to intercede for us and help us in particular needs. St. Anthony of Padua, for example, is known to be the saint one turns to when he has lost something – and, if you are wondering, he does come through regularly on this. The only thing he doesn’t readily help me with is my lost golf balls after a poor shot. But that’s my problem, not so much his.

I’m not precisely sure who the patron saint of photographers is. I know St. Lucy is a saint for eye problems and optometrists. Google tells me it is St. Veronica: as in “Veronica’s veil”, she who, according to our tradition, wiped the face of Jesus with a cloth while he was carrying the cross to Calvary. His image was imprinted onto the cloth: hence, as a camera advertiser once put it in a TV commercial a few years ago, “image is everything.”



Here’s a stained glass window of the Holy Family, taken at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Thurmont.

Whether St. Veronica, St. Lucy or another saint, as we celebrate All Saints Day this week I was reflecting on the saints and also the joy I have found in a recently renewed interest in photography. Of the many tools one needs in photography, the most important (besides the camera itself) is light. Without light, an image cannot be captured... and of course nothing can be seen. And with light, whether natural like the sunlight or forms of artificial light, a person’s smile can be enjoyed, a forest and stream appreciated, a family meal remembered – with a picture, a photograph. And of course many of us share these images with friends: online via social media, Instagram, Facebook and e-mail, etc.



A tree that stands on the parish property at St. Anthony Shrine in Emmitsburg.

When I think of light, photography, and images from this, it makes me think about the saints. The reason we know so much in our Catholic and Christian tradition about the saints is because these were the ones who were most generous with God,

and also humble enough to let the light shine through them. They were like the camera helping produce the image: and the “light” within all of them is Christ. His light creates the image, and helps it to be seen as beautiful by all.

Contemplating the saints, and photography, and light itself: may we, each and all, be like cameras with open lenses. (Someone just walked into our parish office, dimly lit, and said to us “Do you need the light on?” Yes, that really happened! As I was writing this.)

Like an open lens: always open to God’s plan in our lives, open to His grace, open to His light. A photographer relies on it: so too ourselves, we pray, to be the saint, the person God has created us to be, made in his image.