

Virtues for Ordinary Saints

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All Saints Day occurs on October 31st, which of course coincides with Halloween. The current installation is a merging of the two, with masks representing an interpretation of each of the seven virtues, some of which might be attributed to past Saints.

Of course there are more than seven virtues, but the artist needed to keep the project manageable, so the seven included are those articulated by Pope Gregory I in 590ce. These are chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience and humility. The contrasting “sins” are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, envy, wrath and pride. Given that All Saints Day is a celebration of virtuous exemplars, the artist chose to visually interpret only the virtues. Note that these interpretations reflect the imagination of the artist.

Sainthood in the Protestant church is less formal than in the Catholic church. Saints (with a small “s”) can be ordinary people who offer simple miracles through their virtuous actions. This installation recognizes the way virtues enhance our lives and the lives of others around us in ordinary and extraordinary ways.

Chastity

The artist has chosen to represent chastity with a veil, which symbolizes the body shrouded in a layer of divine self respect and human dignity. The eyes reveal the spark of the divine, recognizable by others who see the worth, value and beauty of the person under the veil.



The veil is self chosen, not forced on the one who wears it. The choice is a way of claiming and honouring the wearer's humanity. Chastity recognizes the body as a cherished temple of worth and dignity, not as an object to be used or exploited.

Because the greatest love of all

Is happening to me

I found the greatest love of all

Inside of me

The greatest love of all

Is easy to achieve

Learning to love yourself

It is the greatest love of all

Whitney Houston, The Greatest Love of All

Temperance

Temperance is meant to encourage moderation. In the artistic representation, the artist has used the familiar yin yang symbol to convey the lively dynamic between wants and needs. In this sense, temperance does not negate the human desire for wanting. Instead it is recognized as a natural and inevitable part of the human condition. The invitation is to learn how to find the right balance between what we want and what we need.



*You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime you just might find
You get what you need*
Rolling Stones, Satisfaction

Charity

Charity is multifaceted because the gifts we receive from the abundance of creation are infinite. The artist recognizes the gifts that humanity brings in the exercise of giving and sharing. Too often we think that what we most desire in the way of gift is outside of ourselves. However the artist sees that our very existence is a gift in and of itself. Note the diamond-like eyes. All we need to do is awaken to the rich gift of our own being and that our greatest gift to others is our presence.



You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

Kahlil Gibran

Diligence

The first thing that comes to mind with diligence is the notion of hard work. Thus the artist is trying to convey the rugged determination and zeal of embracing a task or goal. (Blood, sweat and tears.) Hard Work can be underrated, but taking on an initiative, even while it may be daunting, can be energizing and life giving. Important learning comes from applying ourselves to a challenge, helping us to discover capacities we didn't know we had. Diligence can also inspire others, offering a sense of security, confidence and inspiration in families and communities.



*I won't give up, no, I won't give in
'Til I reach the end, and then I'll start again
No, I won't leave, I wanna try everything
I wanna try even though I could fail*
Try Everything (Shakira from Zootopia)

Kindness

What the artist is trying to capture with this piece is that kindness is valuable to both giver and receiver (notice the gold in the hands of the giver and the eyes of the receiver). In our culture, kindness is sometimes given for selfish reasons, with expectation that one will receive something in return. Such kindness more often creates suffering. True kindness is a way of being in the world that recognizes how the need for kindness is universal. Kindness extends not just to human beings but to all life on earth.



There comes a time
When we heed a certain call
When the world must come together as one
There are people dying
Oh, and it's time to lend a hand to life
The greatest gift of all
We are the World

Patience

In our drive-through, order online and uber eats culture, patience is definitely a virtue. The artist recognizes the value of patience as a way to slow down and carefully discern the direction our lives are taking. Yielding, pausing, reflecting both deeply and broadly about what is occurring in the present moment allows for options. Rather than demanding that life happen on our terms, patience teaches us that we do have choices and that each moment offers an opportunity to choose peace, joy, grace, compassion . . . or whatever might reduce suffering in ourselves or others.



*Have patience with all things,
but first of all,
with yourself.*

Saint Francis de Sales

Humility

The open book is not about self-disclosure, it's about being humble, recognizing that there is always more to learn. Humility admits not knowing, acknowledges times when we are wrong, seeks to understand before being understood. Humility opens the book of our lives to be written on in new chapters, with broad characters and interesting stories to tell. When we are humble it is like being a child again and discovering something new. The invitation in the virtue of humility is to be curious about everything, even things we don't like!



*Oh Lord it's hard to be humble,
When you're perfect in every way!*
Mac Davis, It's Hard to be Humble