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Like motherhood, our faith is about faces, not facts



[Terrance Klein](https://www.americamagazine.org/voices/terrance-klein)May 06, 2020

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I spoke with Bertha last Sunday evening. Still quarantined, I had been alone the entire day, and toward evening I was feeling blue. This virus has taken so many lives. It’s taken so much from our lives. Like any other hardship, we bear it, but sometimes…we can’t bear it.

So I said: “Bertha, I’m tired of it. I want it to go away. It’s gone on too long, taken too much. Please, Bertha, take it away.”

Does it seem odd that I asked this of a friend? To do what God alone can do? But, perhaps you have done the same.

You see, Bertha died three years ago. I was her pastor; she was my friend. In her last years, we talked a lot about what it meant to grow infirm with age, to be estranged from family, to lose those whom we love, to know that death is drawing nigh.

You can profess facts, but you can only trust a face. You can only entrust yourself to a person.

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Like so many whirling thoughts, like so many people, living and dead—people I pray for, people I worry about, people who inspire me—Bertha came to mind last Sunday evening as I was praying. And, always having lived in a communion of saints, I did not just think of her. In the final commendation of the Roman funeral rite, we say, “In the sight of this world she is now dead; in your sight may she live forever.’ I spoke to Bertha because she belongs fully to Christ, to what as a child I was taught to call “the church triumphant.”

“Let this end. Please, Bertha!” Why not ask her? Bertha is my friend. I trust her.

Do not let the Reformation ruffle you. The Father’s will must “be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Praying to the saints is not a way to slip by God’s sovereignty. The saints in heaven never desire anything other than God’s will.

So what was happening in my prayer? Why did I instinctively plead with Bertha rather than our Lord? I would answer that by saying that our faith is rooted in a face, not facts. You can profess facts, but you can only trust a face. You can only entrust yourself to a person. Yes, we believe what Jesus has taught us, but, most of all, we believe Jesus. We trust him.

Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You have faith in God; have faith also in me (Jn 14:1).

Mother’s Day makes my point. Have you ever asked to see the file on your mother? Ever run a background check on dear old mom? Did you ever look at her and say: “Lady, why should I trust you. You’re only my mother.” You believe your mom because you believe in your mom.

Thomas said to him,
“Master, we do not know where you are going;
how can we know the way?”
Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:5-6).

Motherhood, Bertha, the saints, our faith: it’s all about confiding ourselves to faces, not facts. This why sometimes when we pray, the face of a saint, a memory like motherhood, imposes itself on us. We are not circumventing Christ. It is his way of coming to us, of saying to us: “I was here for you, in this face. I am still here for you, in this face. You can trust me.”

***Readings:***[***Acts 6:1-7 1 Peter 2:4-9 John 14:1-12***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/051020.cfm)