

Going Gray

November reminds us of the communion of saints



November's saints invite us to embrace the body as the site of companionship. These days I find myself looking down at my hands with their veins like dried riverbeds, like distant satellite images of possible planetary water. I look in the mirror at my forehead with its permanent creases, evidence of too much squinting and smiling and frowning. I sweep back my scattering of gray hairs. It feels like such a

different thing, to watch the passage of years written on my body. "*Contento, Señor, contento,*" Alberto Hurtado was known to say, even as pancreatic cancer was ending his life. "I'm content, Lord. I'm content."

Hurtado, a Jesuit, seemed to have embraced that elusive Ignatian spiritual discipline of indifference, a non-defensive vulnerability to the will of God and to reality. Paradoxically, his practiced contentment made him more, not less, committed to justice, which he sought in corporal—which is to say, bodily—works of mercy among those whose own bodies society had deemed most expendable. Maybe it's contentment I'm seeking when I marvel at the graying hair of the people with whom I was once young. Sanctity is often miscast as the ascetic subordination of our fallible, decaying bodies to the eternity of the soul, as if the one can be extracted from the other. But November's saints invite us, I think, to embrace the body as the site of companionship: with one another, with time, with God. Maybe that's what relics are; their bones speak to our bones, their flesh to our flesh. In the communion of saints, the dead keep company with one another. In funeral programs and fragments of cloth and steadily graying hair, they keep us company, too.

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