

Text:

Theme: I Believe in the Communion of Saints

November 6, 2016

Have you ever spoken words so many times that they have little meaning? We've all been there, done that. Each time we speak the Apostles' Creed, we speak the words, "I believe in the Communion of Saints," yet how often do we consider what that is or who is part of the Communion of Saints? Today, as we observe All Saint's Day, we consider familiar words in order to attach new meaning as we consider our theme: I Believe in the Communion of Saints.

I. As faith-filled people of God, we are numbered among the Communion of Saints.

A. But how are we privileged to be numbered among that Communion? 1. We are numbered among them by admitting we are sinners. However, sin isn't a popular topic today. Many would prefer that we simply remove "sin" and "sinner" from the dictionary so that no one could use those terms in reference to us. Yet as members of the Communion of Saints, we first acknowledge that we are numbered among the communion of sinners, the communion of those who are far less than perfect, who fail to live up to God's standards, who break the heart of God every day by our words and actions.

2. We are numbered among the Communion of Saints by clinging to our faith. Our world is a strange place, a place that's incredibly eager to throw away the past, all that has worked in the past, all that was part of God's original intent because it thinks it has a better idea. In the midst of this strange and decaying world, we must hold on to our faith. St. Paul, near the end of his life, spoke those incredible words which include, "I have kept the faith." Today, Paul would say, "Hold on. Don't let it go. Don't allow anyone or any thing to take it from you. You must cling to your faith. You must be one who says, 'Here I stand. I can do no other so help me God!'"

3. We are numbered among them by being eager to gather for worship. In the early church, what did they look forward to most? Living for the weekend or living for the next worship opportunity? As you think of those who have gone before us whom we would number among the saints, what's the common denominator among them? It's worship. This was their place. They had their pew. They were here because they realized the value of God's presence. As those numbered among the Communion of Saints, this is our place to gather, our place to be encouraged, our place to stand in the presence of God, to meet God like we can meet Him in no other place.

4. We are numbered among the community of saints by using our abilities to the best of our ability. Within each one of us, within each person who has gone before us as one of the faithful, God has placed incredible gifts and abilities. Yet to be numbered among that elite group, our God says, "Use your gifts. Don't compare; don't believe others can do it better. Use what I have given you to the best of your ability. When you have done that, you will have done what brings a smile to My face!" It's so easy to set our talents aside because of what we perceive, but as part of that community of saints, God is waiting for each one of us to use what we have as best we can.

5. We are numbered among them by offering care and compassion. Jesus spent more time offering care and compassion than anything else. Because we are chosen

by God to make a difference, He calls us to offer that same care and compassion. How we do it will differ from person to person, but what demonstrates our place among that community of saints is that we are known as people with a heart, as caring and compassionate people. As those around us see our care and compassion, they see Jesus through us and as they see Jesus, Jesus reminds us that our care and compassion are evidence of our place in the Communion of Saints.

6. We are numbered among them by fighting the daily battle. Maybe you remember the imagery from Catechism class or maybe not. Either way, life is an ongoing battle between the Old Man and the New Man, a daily battle to drown the old and allow the new to guide and direct our lives. Returning to Paul's incredible words, we hear him say, "I have fought the good fight." While we remain on this side of heaven and numbered among the saints, our God says, "Fight the good fight of faith. Fight it today. Fight it tomorrow. Fight it every day until you arrive in heaven." Because we are part of that great community, it's what we do. It's the least we can do.

7. We are numbered among that community by keeping our focus on our race. We recognize the words, "I have finished the race." Before each one of us there is a race. Your race is not like my race and my race is not like someone else's race. By God's incredible design, we each have a different race to run. As part of the community of saints, we run our race, not his race or her race or our preferred race or the race we've selected from the jukebox list of races. We keep our focus on our race. It may be tempting to take a detour or to think someone else has a race we'd rather run, but as those saints, we focus on our race knowing that, we are running the right direction.

8. We are numbered among them by being encouraged by them. How limited is the Communion of Saints? Are there only a select few? Are they only among us or does the communion extend beyond this life? Hebrews gives us the answer, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." Those witnesses are our encouragers. When we face life's struggles, we look to their example of perseverance. When life doesn't make sense, which occurs almost daily, we look at how they kept going in the midst of a confusing world. As we allow them to be our encouragers, we assure ourselves that we are numbered among them, among that Communion of Saints.

9. We are numbered among them by keeping our focus on the eternal. Have you noticed? Things we buy today don't last as long as they used to. Today, we live in a throw away world. Instead of fixing it, our only option is to buy a new one. That lack of longevity and quality serves as a constant reminder that all this is temporary, that we can have all kinds of stuff, but it's just stuff that wears out sooner than expected. As the community of saints, our focus is on things eternal, on those things that have been promised. It's eternity that lasts forever and it's that eternity which binds us together forever as the Communion of Saints.

10. The words may have been spoken in the past with little thought because it's what humans do. However, the next time you have opportunity, speak boldly and thoughtfully, "I believe in the Communion of Saints." Amen.