

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2026

Part one of "The Communion of Saints"

Today's Gospel, Matthew 10: 37-24, shows us the importance of taking care of our fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, even in what seem to be small ways. To be a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to be, through a real relationship with the Living Truth, Jesus Christ, a member of the Communion of Saints. Today, I will preach the first part of a four part sermon on the Communion of Saints.

For a while, it was extremely fashionable to produce "mission statements." That fad came and went as most fads do, with little discernible effect. Still, the idea of figuring out why a group exists in the first place is hardly a bad idea. It is a very good idea.

The problem was that figuring out any group's purpose for existence is hard work, and therefore resorting to cliché was probably inevitable, with people producing lots of variations on "to serve our members and community," and "to make the world a better place." It is not easy to say exactly what any group's unique purpose is.

Underneath the clichés, the fad had a point. Any group can get very busy, and at times it has to ask if all its business is truly necessary. What is necessary business and what is not? That depends on why the group exists in the first place. What is it for?

What is the Church for?

How would you answer that question?

What is the Church for?

I suppose that people here might give various answers to that question.

The Church exists to: enlarge the mind, to make us thoughtful, to teach religious knowledge, to enable us to think and act for ourselves, to make us good citizens, to make us good neighbors, to help us be religious, to help us live ethically . . . etc. etc. etc.

None of those really hit the center of the target.

The preamble to the Constitution of the United States states what the government thus constituted exists to do. Does the Church have a Constitution? She does. We call it the Bible. In the Bible we find the answer to what we exist to do. Why did St. Paul, whose feast we celebrate (with St. Peter) on June 29th, endure so much sorrow, loneliness, disappointment, heartache, danger, and physical injury (five times scourged, thrice beaten with rods, once stoned, and twice shipwrecked)? He tells us why in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save at least some" He labored to connect people to the saving Truth and saving Grace that rescue people from the second death and replace that fate with Eternal Life. He labored that people might hear the good news that just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, they too can live in newness of life, and therefore think of themselves as dead to sin and alive for God in Christ Jesus (today's second reading, Romans 6: 3-4, 8-11)

The Church exists for one purpose and one purpose only, to save people from the second death and bring them into Eternal Life by putting them, through Sacred Scripture and Divine Worship, in contact with the Living and Eternal Truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God knows, but we do not know, who will respond to our preaching of Jesus Christ and invitation to His Sacraments. Why some embrace the Living Truth and some do not is necessarily mysterious to us. Those who do embrace the Living Truth that is Jesus Christ form the Communion of Saints. This Communion of Saints is the army that follows the Lamb of God

wherever He goes, that finally defeats all the powers of this world, and will ultimately judge all worldly powers. The well being of every member of that holy army is the responsibility of every Christian. We are supposed to take care of each other, helping each other fight the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, there are different ways each member of the Church fights the good fight of faith. Day by day, for most of you, that means simply being pleasant and courteous people, and practicing hospitality. Do not underestimate the effect of simple good manners and hospitality on fellow Christians who feel beat up by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Simple good manners and hospitality are powerfully refreshing. The Lord Jesus, in today's Gospel, promises a heavenly reward to those who practice simple good manners and hospitality. "Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And any one who gives to one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink because he is a disciple, Amen, I tell you, will surely not lose his reward." (Matthew 10, 41-42)

Practice courtesy and hospitality toward your fellow Christians as they work to put people in contact with the Living Truth, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Church's mission. When, by God's help, there is any success in that mission, there are secondary effects in this world. Whenever there are any people in contact with that Living Truth, the moral tone of society rises, crime decreases, and public behavior improves. Those, however, are secondary effects of success in our mission. The mission itself is to put people into contact with Jesus Christ.

Now, being officially Christian and being daily in contact with Jesus Christ are hardly identical. Our experience over two thousand years shows us that officially Christian merchants are as capable of greed as heathen merchants, and officially Christian scholars as capable of arrogance as heathen scholars. Every profession has those sins to which it is particularly prone, and the mere label "Christian" is not a defense against those sins. Nominally Christian lawyers, soldiers, farmers, politicians, and entertainers, do not behave any better or worse than heathen lawyers, soldiers, farmers, politicians, and entertainers. Human nature remains human nature even after the rite of Baptism. Baptism confers the potential for something infinitely greater than normal human nature, but that potential is only realized through an active relationship with the Living Truth, Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict XVI once used the phrase "the merely baptized" to express this truth. Baptism must be followed up by a true relationship with Jesus Christ, established through Sacred Scripture and Divine Worship (sacred Tradition being primarily a matter of worship). The Church exists to enable people to have that saving relationship.

A relationship with Jesus Christ turns people, little by little, into saints. The Church's mission, then, is to make saints. This is not mainly a matter of entrolling names on the official list ("canon" in Greek, hence "canonization") of saints. The vast majority of the saints are not known to the whole world, and are not meant to be. Everywhere the Church exists, she makes saints, known to a few people perhaps, but known especially by God. We do hold up the official list publicly as examples of what a relationship with Jesus Christ does; but we do humbly, acknowledging that the true identity and full number of the Communion of Saints are known only to God.