

The Communion of Saints

Everything we have, we have in communion. Existence in communion is the only kind of existence there is. That is how God exists and it is how we exist in him and with him. God himself *is* communion—the loving relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit. Adoption, creation and salvation are ours because the Son shares the communion of the Triune Life with us by being in communion with our human nature.

Our texts this week point us to how our experience of life is an experience in communion. The Psalmist says that we have no good thing apart from the Lord (Psalm 16:2), and in his sermon in Acts 2, Peter explains to the Israelites of his time that they can't just kill Jesus and get rid of him. They are bound up in his death and resurrection whether they like it or not. In fact, John points us to the way in which the resurrection of Jesus himself is known and experienced in communion. John tells us that Thomas did not believe in Jesus' resurrection until he was together, in communion, with the believing community and experienced Jesus there (John 20:26).

Where the reality of communion really gets interesting, though, is in Peter's epistle. He commends us for loving Jesus even though we have not seen him (1 Peter 1:8). When we read Peter's eyewitness testimony to the resurrection, we really begin to see how utterly dependent we are on the communion of the saints. We each have our own experiences of meeting and being in relationship with Jesus (as John discusses in his article this week), but how can we confirm and check our experiences? How can we know that our personal experiences of the risen Jesus are not mere flights of fancy or self-delusion? Because we have the "control" of the apostles' experience to check ourselves against. In this context the word "control" means to "verify an experiment by a parallel experiment or standard of comparison." In other words, I can confirm by reading their words that the Jesus that Peter met and saw resurrected, whose wounds Thomas touched, is the same Jesus I know through the Spirit in my personal spiritual life.

Without the apostles and the Church, and the Bible they produced—without the communion of saints—we would be left wondering what is real and what is imaginary. But because we have communion with Jesus through the Spirit, and because we have communion with each other through the Spirit, and have communion with the apostles and all the saints who have gone before us through the Spirit, we have a standard of comparison by which to sort out truth from falsehood.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead, glorified and resurrected on the third day as he said he would? Yes. How do I know? I have met him, alive and seated at the Father's right hand, and the communion of saints confirms that we are all blessed in this way: Blessed to love him though we do not yet see him.

~ Jonathan Stepp