

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Unseen Company

Many of us belong to churches where a creed is often repeated by the congregation. Several of the ancient creeds include these words, "I believe in the communion of saints." For some the word *saints* means only certain specially holy people who have been officially designated as such. For others it means those who are now in heaven. The Bible is very matter-of-fact in showing that those who belong to Christ, i.e., Christians, are saints. Look at Acts 9:32 and 41 for a start. Then note the salutations in Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, and other places.

Do you ever think much about that communion? Do you actually believe in it? I'm learning. The *communion* of saints takes no notice of location. Here or on the other side of the world or in heaven, all who love the Lord are included, bound together as a body whose Head is Christ. The gallery of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 comprises not only those who achieved thrilling victories through faith, but also the destitute and persecuted, those who were tortured, flogged, imprisoned, and even sawn in two—people whom the world would never deem worthy, yet the Bible says the world was not worthy of *them*! And here's something worth pausing over: *all* were "commended for their faith, yet *none* of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (vv. 39-40).

When I pray I am often preoccupied and distracted, aware that my efforts are feeble and seemingly quite useless, but the thought that those distinguished heroes are to be perfected along with me (and with the writer of Hebrews, and with you and all the rest of the followers of the Lamb) changes the picture altogether and puts new heart into me. Grand and mysterious things are in operation. We are not alone. My prayers are perhaps a single note in a symphony, but a necessary note, for I believe in the communion of saints. We need each

other. The prayers of one affect all. The obedience of one matters infinitely and forever.

We are told that we are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1)—those who found in Christ "their Rock, their Fortress, and their Might, their Captain in the well-fought fight" (to borrow the words of an old hymn), and "in the darkness drear their one true Light—Alleluia."

When newly married and living in a little palm-thatched house in the jungle, Jim Elliot and I remembered that even in so remote a place we were still gathered in that great communion, and we used often to sing John Ellerton's hymn, "The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended." (Lars and I sometimes sing it now.) My favorite stanzas:

"We thank Thee that Thy Church, unsleeping,
While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
And rests not now by day or night.

"As o'er each continent and island
The dawn brings on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor die the strains of praise away."

Maybe there is a reader who is very weak and very lonely as he picks up my Newsletter today, tempted to feel that prayer is futile and goes nowhere. Think of the great Unseen Company that watches and prays as we "run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Heb 12:1)! Think of that and be of good cheer—it's much too soon to quit!

Prayer

Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do Thy will, O Lord our God. Amen.

— Ignatius Loyola

A Lighthouse in Brooklyn

For forty years a little piece of my heart has been in Brooklyn, New York. For a few months in 1951 I lived there in order to attend a Spanish-speaking church and take language lessons before going to Ecuador. But ever since last September a bigger piece of my heart is in Brooklyn—so big, in fact, that I felt a longing to give up the house we live in and the work we do and just *move* there!

I'll explain. I'd been invited to speak to a group of women on a Saturday afternoon at Brooklyn Tabernacle. It sounded interesting, but I was not expecting anything quite so thrilling as it proved to be. Brooklyn, for a start, is a tough place. There's a lot of poverty. Drugs and muggings and murders are practically everyday occurrences, and there had been some very ugly riots between Jews and blacks in one of the most "civilized" sections. The neighborhood where I had lived was pretty bleak back then, so I wondered if it could be any worse now. I was eager to try to find 519 Bushwick Avenue (a fifth-floor walk-up, at \$17 per month—lots of noise, strange cooking odors, large rats, and very little heat or hot water). Abraham, the kind man who drove us around, managed to find the location all right, but the whole block had been razed (no wonder). There was nothing there but empty lots. Well, not empty really—mattresses, old refrigerators, bedsprings, tires, sofas with the stuffings coming out, you name it, you could have picked it up. In fact, there were such mountains of trash everywhere, I wondered where they'd put it if they ever *did* decide to clean up the place. Desolate and depressing in the extreme. Graffiti, that hideous evidence of defiance of all law and order, covered every surface within reach of the ground and many high above it. Abraham said thousands of people are always cleaning it up, and it's back the next morning.

I kept thinking about the old gospel song, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning." Here's part of it:

"Dark the night of sin has settled,
Loud the angry billows roar;
Eager eyes are watching, longing,
From the lights along the shore.

"Let the lower lights be burning,
Send a gleam across the wave,
Some poor, fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save."

There on Flatbush Avenue stands Brooklyn Tabernacle, sending its gleam across the wave. Thousands

have "made the harbor" because of its light. My audience was a wonderful mixture of colors and ethnic backgrounds, the music was louder than I'm used to but wonderfully exuberant and heartfelt. There was no doubt about it—those women were *worshipping*. I heard some of their stories—to me nearly unimaginable—of drugs, alcohol, abuse, poverty, abandonment. One mother's anonymous letter to the pastor told of her own heartbreak. Just that week she had learned that her fourteen-year-old daughter was pregnant. The father of the baby is the girl's seventeen-year-old brother. That mother said she had wanted to kill herself and her children, "But I'm making it," she wrote, "with Jesus and the help of this church."

We heard their two-hundred-voice choir at the Billy Graham rally in Central Park on Sunday afternoon, and in the evening, after I had spoken again at the Tabernacle, we were having supper with a group of the church folks. I asked Marie to tell me her story. Her husband smiled and said, "She loves to tell it! It's her favorite story." How I wish I had room for the whole thing. Her mother, five months pregnant, died of cancer. Marie, the baby, was put in a foundling hospital and later entrusted to the care of nuns who treated her cruelly, although they taught her about God. She felt sure God was better than they were, and she knew her daddy loved her, but she was hungry for more. At age ten she began sniffing glue. This led to smoking pot, then doing drugs for the next fifteen years. On a Club Med vacation in Mexico with her boyfriend she began to wonder why she was born. Why had God made her? What meaning was there in it all? God clearly spoke to her, "Maria, give me your life. This is your last chance." Suddenly she lost her desire for drugs and told her boyfriend she would not sleep with him anymore. On her return to New York she found that a group of friends had been praying for her at the very time when this happened. Hers is a totally transformed life. She's married to the boyfriend, who is now a pastor.

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"You should have seen *me*," he said, "long hair, three earrings in each ear, feathers!"

I thought of my own upbringing—Christ as the Head of our house, parents who loved Him, each other, and us. No alcohol or drugs, just the Bible and hymnsinging. A clean house on a clean street. I thought of Nicky Cruz's testimony that same afternoon at the Graham meeting—from deep sin and sorrow to joy; and of Johnny Cash's simple words: "Alcohol never gave me peace. Drugs never brought me happiness. I found both in Jesus Christ. He changed my life." Then he sang, "The Old Account Was Settled Long Ago," while his dear June burst in with her lusty refrain, "Down on my knees!"

Tears come as I write, remembering the unutterable JOY I saw on those upturned faces during those two days. Those people were still living with huge tribulations and deep heartbreaks, yet there was joy, there was peace, and there was love such as I see in few churches. I don't know when I've had so many hugs. How to account for it all? It's quite simple:

"This doctrine of the cross is sheer folly to those on their way to ruin, but to us who are on the way to salvation, it is the power of God.... To shame the wise, God has chosen what the world counts folly, and to shame what is strong, God has chosen what the world counts weakness. He has chosen things low and contemptible, mere nothings, to overthrow the existing order. So there is no place for human pride in the presence of God.... He is our righteousness; in him we are consecrated and set free" (1 Cor 1:18, 27-29 NEB).

Work or Stay Home?

In my efforts to give a clarion call to mothers to *stay home* I have not had much to say to those for whom, so far, it seems impossible to do so. Some are singles whose paycheck must come from outside, some are married to men who insist they bring home some of the "bacon." Because there is so much encouragement from both the world and the church for mothers to get out of the house and find something "fulfilling," I have tried to lay more weight on the commands of Titus 2:3-5, believing this to be God's best. Yet we live in a fallen world where many things are inimical to His best.

To those who work because their husbands ask it, let me say that I believe that your obedience to your husband is obedience to God. God accepts it as such,

and, as in all other matters where we are doing the thing we believe He wants us to do, we leave the *results* of that obedience entirely in His hands. Will not He who is the Father of us all be especially tender to the children whose mothers must leave them for most of the day?

"But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless," says Psalm 10:14, and may we not also trust Him to help those whose mothers have found no other way but to entrust them to another's care?

One mother wrote to thank me for encouraging her to stay at home. She is so glad she is able to, but has been criticized by church people. Another writes that her own mother looks on her with disdain "for putting my children ahead of mere *things*. My sister, also a Christian, enjoys the 'good life' of boats, big houses, beautiful clothes and cross-country vacations. It's a lonely place to be in today's world." Another: "A big thanks for teaching about the awesome job of mothering! When our first baby came I was making more money than my husband. It made absolutely no sense for me to give up my job, but my husband and I both felt it was the right thing to do, and the doctor for whom I worked, a Christian, praised our decision. We've been tested! Now it's cloth diapers for our two babies, garage sales for clothes for the family, living from paycheck to paycheck, at times it was not fun. Part of the time without a vehicle at all—my husband biked to work. I learned to sew, buying patterns at discount stores, even learned to cut clothes down for children. People better off than we are stand in line for government handouts, but we didn't believe in accepting that kind of help. Even in the midst of the worst times, we always tithed, were on time with our bills and mobile home payments, had more than enough to eat and warm clothes to wear (in Minnesota *warm* clothes are essential!). I don't want to sound haughty or proud—just boasting of the Lord and his grace. I feel so *blessed* to have a husband who loves the Lord and is faithful to obey Him."

Recommended Reading

John L. Barger: *Do You Love Me?*, a small booklet, one man's story of the transformation of his love for his wife. Order from Sophia Institute Press, Box 5284, Manchester, NY 03108. 1-9 copies, \$.50 each, plus \$2.00 postage/handling per order.

Memorize by Reading Aloud

Valerie (my daughter) told me that Elisabeth sometimes has trouble sleeping. She's a bit of a worrier by nature (has my genes, alas) and came into Val's bedroom the other night complaining that she couldn't sleep. She had a sore throat, it was very hot in the house, etc. So Val read to her the second chapter of Philippians which Elisabeth had already decided (quite on her own) that she wanted to memorize. After a few readings, Elisabeth began repeating it and got sleepy. Not a bad remedy for insomnia, and certainly a good method of memorizing.

How to Find a Book

Surprising how many write to ask me how to find the books I recommend. The answer is: go to a bookstore. They have a list of books in print, and if they're nice people, they'll certainly order for you what they don't have in stock. Just give them author, title, and publisher.

Keep in Touch

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Travel Schedule January - March 1992

January 21-24 Wheaton College, IL; spring special services, Dr. Stephen Kellough, (708) 260-5087.

January 24,25 Anniston, AL; Faith Presbyterian Church, Rev. Frank Erdman, (205) 238-8721 or 236-4499.

February 9, 16 Hamilton, MA; Christ Church, (508) 468-4461.

February 17-19 taping of "Gateway to Joy."

February 21 Southboro, MA; L'Abri Fellowship, Mary Jane Grooms, (508) 481-6490.

February 22 South Hamilton, MA; Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Dr. Robert Fillinger, (508) 468-7111.

February 29 Oklahoma City, OK; Moody Bible Institute women's day, Mrs. McCarthy, (312) 329-4000.

March 3 Greenville, SC; Taylors First Baptist Church, Mrs. William P. Morrow, (803) 244-3535.

March 4 Gainesville, GA; Westminster Presbyterian Church, Amy Johnson, (404) 532-2903.

March 14 Waterloo, IA; station KNWS, Betty Brandhorst, (319) 296-1975.

March 23-25 taping of "Gateway to Joy."

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