

Relay For Christ
2 Timothy 4:6-8
Nov. 1, 2009

“I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God.” 2 Timothy 4:7-8a

On this All Saints Day we remember five (5) of our members that kept the faith and have received their prize.

Roy, Martin, Pauline, Betty and Larry are now in God’s presence rejoicing with all the other saints.

Unlike any prize we could win here on earth, the victory our saints have achieved is one that lasts for eternity.

Right now the World Series is going on. Either the New York Yankees or the Philadelphia Phillies will become world champions. This prize only lasts for one year. Next year at this time there will be another two teams playing for the championship.

Victory in Jesus! You did a great job singing that hymn. Our focus this morning is on our dearly departed friends and the one who brought them the victory.

Many things were said about Roy, Martin, Pauline, Betty and Larry at their funeral services. Stories were shared and words were used to describe who they were and what they did with their lives. Even today the mention of their names have brought forth some memories.

Of all the attributes we might recall about our saints, the one that stands out today is their faith in Christ. In their own unique way they believed in a Savior and tried the best they could to live good Christian lives. It was this faith in God that assured them there was more to come.

When I would visit Pauline and Betty, both would have a smile on their face and a glimmer in their eye. Their minds may not have been very good but

their spirit was positive. I got to believe a part of that positive energy came from their relationship with God.

Though I was not with them at the very end, the families of Roy and Martin informed me of a confidence each had while facing death.

Just several weeks ago I was talking with Larry. He hoped he would get better, but he was not afraid to die. In fact when it looked like he was losing ground, he commented that it might be better if God took him home.

“In my father’s house there are many rooms”.

Christ promised his disciples that he would come and take them to himself. Larry and all the others are now home. Christ did come and like the good shepherd that is described in the 23rd Psalm, led them through the valley of the shadow of death.

The race is over and the prize has been given. At least it has for those we named this morning. For we who remain however, the race continues.

Does anybody know what this is? This is a baton that is used in relay races. I was able to borrow it from the Groves Athletic Office.

As you know, in a relay race a runner carries the baton so far, either 100 or 400 meters and then hands it off to the next runner. There are four runners in a relay race. The most crucial part of the race is the passing of the baton. It has to be done within a certain space on the track. If you miscalculate the pass, it will cost your team.

If you remember the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the US Men’s Team did not finish because of a bad pass of the baton.

If we use the analogy that the Christian journey is a relay race, then our five (5) saints have handed the baton off to us. They have taken their turn, now it’s up to us.

I am going to hand this baton off to Scott.

I want you to hold on to it for a few moments. As you are holding the baton think about the five (5) we remembered today as well as other friends and family members that have finished their race. Like a relay race I want you to then hand the baton off to the person next to you.

By passing the baton we will not only be remembering those we miss, we will be reminding ourselves of the responsibility we have to carry on the faith.

Remember I said the passing is the most critical time in a race? It has been said that the Christian faith is one generation from extinction.

Though it's hard to imagine a time when there would be no churches, in parts of the world the church is almost non-existent. Even in America the percentage of Christians in this country has been declining.

It is up to us to keep in the race!

Granted we all can only do so much given our age, skill and ability. It's not necessarily what you do, it's the fact you are still doing something that counts.

I know I talked about it several weeks ago, but keeping in the race means understanding what your skills, gifts and passion are and utilizing them for the Lord.

There is a tendency to sit up in the stands and watch the race take place. We can make a lot of excuses why we are there, but they are only excuses. God wants us in the race, doing something until we cross the finish line.

It is the church's responsibility to find ways for folks to be involved. We are supposed to help you discern your gift and then find a place to use it. Ideally the church also helps you develop your skills.

The saying goes: "A team is only as good as its weakest link". I hope we can find ways to help all our members grow in their faith as well as ability.

How is the baton? Has it made its way around?

Generations of Christians past, including the one who started the race, has passed the baton off to us. We are in the race. Will we fight the good fight, run the race, and then hand it off to the next generation?

I pray we won't let Roy, Martin, Pauline, Betty or Larry down. Let's commit to doing our best until the day we cross the finish line and are greeted by all those who have gone on before us.