

"The Communion of Generations"

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All Saints Sunday

November 2, 2025

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. ⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹²and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. ¹³Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. (2 Timothy 1:1-14)

Today, in just a few hours, the town band of the Sicilian city of Messina will begin to play. For centuries, Italian towns have had amateur groups of musicians who regularly play for religious and cultural events. This includes providing musical accompaniment and inspiration for significant religious processions with horns, woodwinds, and, of course, at least one big bass drum. As you might imagine, participation in one of these town bands is both an honor and a responsibility that is passed from generation to generation. It is a rite of passage within certain families, families that teach their children to see this musical heritage and tradition as both a gift and a job to be taken very seriously.¹

In Messina, November 2nd is known as *Il Giorno dei Morti*, the "Day of the Dead." More familiarly, "All Souls Day." Through worship, feasting, and family observances, the town is gathering together to remember and honor loved ones who have passed away. In many ways, it is like Christmas. Family celebrations include special sweets and the singing of holiday songs. But instead of trees, it will be gravestones that are lit with strings of white lights. Instead of stockings hung by the chimney with care, children left their shoes outside last night. If they have been good, they were filled with toys and gifts this morning. If not, they probably received a lump of coal. And tonight, instead of caroling through the town, the townsfolk are gathering even as we speak for the annual procession from the Piazza del Duomo down to the local cemetery, where they will visit the graves of their ancestors to lay wreaths of chrysanthemum and give thanks for the people who shared their lives, gave

¹ Luca Signorini, "Italy's town bands: a tradition that never misses a beat," <https://italoamericano.org>, July 1, 2025.



their love, and passed their faith on to the next generation. Here, there, and in places all around the world, what we observe and celebrate today is a communion of generations.

This is exactly what the author of this letter wants to share with Timothy. They want Timothy to embrace this kind of communion – a spiritual sharing of intimate thoughts, feelings, and shared convictions that has been and should be passed on from generation to generation. It begins with the way Timothy is addressed: *“To Timothy, my beloved child.”* While the author was probably not Timothy’s literal parent, the emotional bond was every bit as strong. Family certainly includes genetic relationships passed on through blood, but it also includes cherished friends who are connected by deep devotion and time. In this case, this parent-child relationship was born in shared commitment to God and the church of Jesus Christ, and it was deep enough for the older mentor to look upon the younger and lovingly call him “my loyal child in the faith.”

Within this framework of love, one generation is passing the baton of ministry on to the next. And what is being passed is both a responsibility and a gift... both a duty and a blessing.

Looking first at the job to be done, it is clearly a daunting one. It is the duty to rekindle the faith. The flame of commitment was flickering, the passion for service was fading. The candle of the church was about to be snuffed out. “Do not let it go out!” the letter says. Stay committed to Christ, stay committed to the church, help others to do the same, and when the world pushes back -- and it will push back -- stay strong. *“For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,”* the letter says, *“but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”* Never apologize for being a person of faith, the letter says. Never be ashamed of the gospel. Instead, hold firm to faith. Trust that what is being passed on to you is true and worthy of acceptance. *“Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me... [and] guard the good treasure entrusted to you.”*

It's a big job. But that job comes with a great gift: the gift of confidence. Not arrogance, but confidence. Arrogance rests on a shaky foundation, an inflated sense of self-importance that separates us from others. But confidence sits firmly on fact and truth. Confidence is a healthy sense of self-esteem and self-assurance. So, while arrogance selfishly denigrates and devalues, confidence is much more likely to seek what is right, to inspire others, and to draw people into common cause for the good.

It is clear that the writer of this letter has deep confidence in Timothy, not only because of what they saw in him, but what they knew about those who had come before him. *“I am reminded of your sincere faith,”* the letter says, *“a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.”* Lois, whose name in Greek means “agreeable” or “desirable,” had lovingly passed her faith down to her daughter Eunice, whose name meant “victory.” Together, those two women helped to raise a young man who was a combination of the best in both of them – an “agreeable victory.”² Remember what your grandmother and your mother were able to do, the letter says. If they can do it, you can too, because the same power and ability that was in them is in you. The same faith is in you. The same power is in you.

I am convinced that this kind of confidence is one of the greatest gifts we can give to a child. To make sure they know – without a shadow of a doubt – that we not only love them, but that we believe in them. We want them to internalize what Christopher Robin once said

² <http://historyswomen.com/womenoffaith/LoisEunice.html>

to Winnie-the-Pooh: "If ever there's a tomorrow when we're not together, there's something you must remember. You are braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."³

How do we instill this message? We do what every generation has always tried to do. Provide the best example we can. Reinforce the good when we see it in the next generation. And then trust them to follow.

This is ancient wisdom, but it is still relevant today, still desperately needed today. The flame of faith is flickering, and we have to do our part to rekindle it, and to pass it on as generations before us have done. As Presbyterians, we are still saying what this letter said. In more modern language, we say it this way: *"Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church."*⁴

Right now, in Messina, Sicily, the band is warming up. The generations are gathering to remember all the souls who have come before them.

Once again, they will rekindle the flame that has been carried through the ages by agreeable grandmothers, victorious mothers, and faithful fathers.

Once again, they will draw confidence from those who came before them, remembering that the faith that lived in their ancestors is very much alive in them.

They are a half a world away, but what is happening there is not that different than what is happening here. Life in their church is basically the same as life in ours. In the church, in the life of faith, each generation has work to do, but what a gift it is to share it. Yes, there are responsibilities, but the faithful completion of our calling to serve brings so many blessings – blessings of grace, joy, hope, and love that remain the same, from generation to generation.

Today, we join with Christians all around the world to remember with joy those saints who taught us the faith and showed us the way. We will share a holy meal that has been passed down through the centuries. Here too we will strike up the band, join our voices together, and hold our own procession – procession that ends with light, remembrance, gratitude and joy. In our own place, in our own way, we will rekindle the flame of faith – a faith discovered and lived in a communion of generations... a faith that I am sure lives on in you. **Amen.**

³ "Pooh's Grand Adventure: The Search for Christopher Robin," Walt Disney Home Entertainment (1997).

⁴ *Book of Order*, G-1.0304.