

"THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS"

Jerry Johnson

"What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints? The communion of saints is the Church." (CCC 946) Following this statement, the Catechism goes on to explain the two closely linked meanings of the term "communion of saints". The first is derived from the fact that we are all born into the Body of Christ at our baptism. We are so united, as part of one body, that whatever good exists in each of us is communicated to all of the members of the body. This first expression of the "communion of saints" is described by the Church as a "communion in holy things". Since Christ is the head of the body and all good resides in him, this communion in holy things is profoundly experienced as the "riches of Christ are communicated to all the members" (CCC 947). This takes place in a very real way through the sacraments, which, as the Catechism describes, are "sacred links" which unite us to one another and bind us all to Jesus Christ. In also calling the Eucharist "Holy Communion" we are acknowledging the fact that it is primarily the Body and Blood of Christ which brings about this communion of the faithful. There is also a communion of "charisms" or specific graces given to each of the members for the building up of the Body, the

Church, and a communion of "charity" or "love" which must exist among the members. This "communion of holy things", exists as a common fund which we all contribute to and draw from as members of the "communion of saints". As members of one body, "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself" (Rom 14:7). Whether we realize it or not, we are all in solidarity with one another and whatever our acts, good or sinful, can profit or harm this communion. There is no such thing as a "private act" in the communion of saints! This brings us to the second of the closely linked meanings we mentioned at the onset. The "communion of saints" is also a "communion among holy persons". These persons exist in three different "states" of being. Those of us physically alive here on earth are referred to as the "pilgrims on earth". Others, who have died, but are being purified, are experiencing the second state of existence in purgatory, while still others are experiencing the Lord and his glory in heavenly beatitude. These three different states of existence in no way hinder the communion we share, but can, in fact, reinforce our union by an exchange of spiritual goods. Those who now are more closely united with Christ, continue to intercede for all of the members of the Body, and their merits gain for us an even stronger communion with Christ. As we mentioned earlier, we all benefit

from the good which is brought to the Body by each of the members. This also means that those who are in purgatory can greatly benefit from our intercession and the sacrifices and sufferings which we offer up on their behalf. As they are helped, they are then capable of an even more effective intercession before the Father on our behalf. From this discussion, we can certainly see the importance of this communion we share with all of the saints, both those still alive here on earth and those who have moved beyond this earthly existence. We come to understand why we pray *for* those saints who have gone before us and may be in purgatory and *to* those who are in heaven, asking for their powerful intercession. We must continue to be mindful of our union with them and the good or harmful effect that our actions have on the Body of Christ. Let us seek to deepen our conversion and our devotion to Christ so that our lives and our intercession will always help to build up the Body and bring all of us in this great "communion of saints" to the eternal heavenly beatitude which we all desire!

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and a Master Catechist for the Diocese.

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SACRED SCRIPTURE



"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers".

(Acts 2:41,42)

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. "

(1 Cor 12:4-7)

"...But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that

the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

(1 Cor 12:24-27)

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

(Eph 4:15,16)

"Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin."

(2Maccabees12:46)

SACRED TRADITION

"The Church is a "communion of saints": this expression refers first to the "holy things" (sancta), above all the Eucharist, by which "the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ, is both represented and brought about". (CCC 960)

"The term "communion of saints" refers also to the communion of "holy persons" (sancti) in Christ who "died for all," so that what each one does or suffers in and for Christ bears fruit for all." (CCC 961)

"We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful

love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers" (Paul VI, CPG § 30).

"Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life."
(St. Dominic)

"I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth." (St. Therese of Lisieux)

"We worship Christ as God's Son; we love the martyrs as the Lord's disciples and imitators, and rightly so because of their matchless devotion towards their king and master. May we also be their companions and fellow disciples!
(Martyrium Polycarpi)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

- Do I have an awareness of the communion of saints and the part I play in that communion?
- Do I pray for the intercession of the saints on my behalf?
- Do I make intercession and offer suffrage for the faithful departed?