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# What is the Communion of Saints?

When we recite the Creed every Sunday at Mass, we say, "I believe in the communion of saints" — but what exactly is the communion of saints? What do we mean by this expression?

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## Summary

1. What kind of fellowship did the first Christians live? What is communion in spiritual goods?

## 2. What is the communion of the Church in heaven and on earth?

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, the communion of saints is the Church. "The term 'communion of saints' ... has two closely linked meanings: communion in holy things (*sancta*) and among holy persons (*sancti*)" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 948).

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## **1. What kind of fellowship did the first Christians live? What is communion in spiritual goods?**

The Acts of the Apostles recounts that the disciples "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). What is this communion, or fellowship, that continues to be lived in the Church today?

In the first place, it is communion *in the faith* that is professed, which is a treasure of life that is enriched as it is shared. Secondly, it is communion *in the sacraments*, which bring about union with God. In fact, one of the sacraments, the Eucharist, is often called "Communion" since the greatest union with God possible here on earth takes place in it.

In addition, the Holy Spirit distributes special graces among the faithful for their common benefit. These are called charisms. Another aspect of this communion is the more material one: sharing our possessions with our neighbors, helping the needy, etc.

Finally, this communion is a communion of charity, which is the most important virtue and one of the theological virtues (so named because God gives them to us directly): "None of us lives for

oneself, and no one dies for oneself" (Rom 14:7). In this solidarity with all men, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the profit of all. Every sin harms this communion.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 949-953)

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- Communion of Saints. — How shall I explain it? You know what blood-transfusions do for the body? Well that is more or less what the Communion of Saints does for the soul. (*The Way*, 544)
- Pray to God that in the Holy Church, our Mother, the hearts of all may be one heart, as they were in the earliest times of Christianity; so that the words of Scripture may be truly fulfilled until the end of the

ages: *Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una* — the company of the faithful were of one heart and one soul. —I am saying this to you in all seriousness: may this holy unity not come to any harm through you. Take it to your prayer! (*The Forge*, 632)

- Please say a prayer each day for the following intention: that all of us Catholics may be faithful and determined to struggle to be saints. —It is so obviously reasonable. What else are we to desire for those we love, for those who are bound to us by the strong ties of the faith? (*The Forge*, 925)
- Before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament — how I love to make an act of explicit faith in the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist! — use your prayer to stir up in your hearts the eagerness to spread the

fervour of their resolute beating to every part of the earth, to the utmost corner of the planet where even one man may be found generously spending his life in the service of God and souls. Thanks to the ineffable reality of the Communion of Saints, we are indeed all joined together — 'fellow workers', St John says — in the task of spreading the truth and the peace of the Lord. (*Friends of God*, 154)

- When thinking about all this, I should like us to take stock of our mission as Christians. Let's turn our eyes to the holy Eucharist, toward Jesus. He is here with us, he has made us a part of himself: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." God has decided to stay in the tabernacle to nourish us, strengthen us, make us divine

and give effectiveness to our work and efforts. Jesus is at one and the same time the sower, the seed and the final result of the sowing: the bread of eternal life. (*Christ is Passing By*, 151)

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## **2. What is the communion of the Church in heaven and on earth?**

The Church is made up of the Lord's disciples. Some are on pilgrimage on earth; others, already deceased, purify themselves in purgatory; while others already contemplate God in the joy of heaven.

But how does this union between the different members of the Church come about?

On the one hand, we can always pray to God for those who accompany us on our journey to heaven. This

prayer of intercession expresses charity and fraternal love among Christians.

The people who are in heaven do not cease to intercede for us before the Father. Their fraternal concern helps us greatly in our weakness.

Moreover, their example helps us to set our gaze on the goal, eternal life.

On the other hand, the pilgrim Church remembers the deceased and offers suffrages for them, so that they may be freed from their sins and may go as soon as possible to the happiness of heaven. Our prayer for them not only helps them, but also makes their intercession effective on our behalf.

In the Holy Mass, we are united with our brothers and sisters "scattered throughout the world" (*Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer III) and also with those who are being purified and those who are glorified

in heaven, so as to see in them the face of God. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 954-959, 1354, 1370-1371)

"The Church prays for the deceased in a particular way during Holy Mass. The priest states: "Be mindful, O Lord, of thy servants who have gone before us with the sign of faith, and rest in the sleep of peace. To these, O Lord, and to all that sleep in Christ, grant we beseech thee a place of refreshment, light and peace" (Roman Canon). It is a simple, effective, meaningful remembrance, because it entrusts our loved ones to God's mercy. We pray with Christian hope that they may be with him in Paradise, as we wait to be together again in that mystery of love which we do not comprehend, but which we know to be true because it is a promise that Jesus made.

"Remembering the faithful departed must not cause us to forget to also pray for the living, who together with us face the trials of life each day. All of us, living and dead, are in communion, that is, as a union; united in the community of those who have received Baptism, and of those who are nourished by the Body of Christ and form part of the great family of God. We are all the same family, united. For this reason we pray for each other" (Pope Francis, audience, November 30, 2016).

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- Son, how well you lived the Communion of Saints when you wrote: "Yesterday I felt that you were praying for me!" (*The Way*, 546)
- You will find it easier to do your duty if you think of how your brothers are helping you, and of the help you fail to give them if

you are not faithful. (*The Way*, 549)

- "Pray for me," I said as I always do. And he answered in amazement: "But is something the matter?" I had to explain that something is the matter or happens to us all the time; and I added that when prayer is lacking, "more and more weighty things are the matter." (*Furrow*, 479)
- The person who stops struggling causes harm to the Church, to his own supernatural undertaking, to his brothers and to all souls.— Examine yourself. Could you not put a more lively love for God into your spiritual combat? — I am praying for you... and for everyone. You should do the same. (*The Forge*, 107)
- Through the communion of the saints, all Christians receive grace from every Mass that is

celebrated, regardless of whether there is an attendance of thousands of persons, or whether it is only a boy with his mind on other things who is there to serve. In either case, heaven and earth join with the angels of the Lord to sing: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus... (*Christ is Passing By*, 89)

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