

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

(J.F.M.H. – 6.7.2017)

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.” The faithful on earth (the Church militant), the saints in heaven (the Church triumphant) and all the souls in purgatory (the Church suffering) form one great holy Community, the Church. They are all sanctified by the Holy Spirit and united to each other through Him. We call this, ‘The Communion of Saints’. There exists a communion of goods in the Church. Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others. The most important member of the Church (the body of Christ) is Our Lord Himself, since He is the head... and the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the Sacraments. As the Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund. The term ‘Communion of Saints’ has two closely linked meanings: communion ‘in holy things (Sancta)’, and ‘among holy persons (Sancti)’. Pope Francis linked the doctrine of the Communion of Saints with our condition as Children of God through Baptism, a condition that is called ‘Divine Filiation’. It is the root of our vocation to Holiness.

The fruits of all the Sacraments belong to all the faithful. They unite us and bind us to our head, Jesus Christ. In this sense the name ‘communion’ can be correctly applied to all the Sacraments, It is most clearly seen in two sacraments, Baptism, (the gate by which we enter the Church), and the Eucharist because it is primarily the Eucharist that brings this about. Within this ‘Communion of Saints there is a ‘Communion of Charity’. St. Paul described it to the Romans and the Corinthians in two of his letters, ***“None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself”*** (Rom.14.7) ***“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*** (1Cor.12, 26-27) In this solidarity of all living and dead, which is founded on the ‘Communion of Saints’, the least of our acts done in charity contributes to the profit of all, however, it must be remembered, that the opposite is also true. Every sin weakens the communion.

The 2nd Vatican Council put this rather well in the Encyclical Lumen Gentium; ***“Until the Lord comes in his glory, and all the angels with him (Mt.25.31) and death is destroyed and all things have been put in subjection under him (1 Cor.15: 26-27), some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth, some, their life now over, are undergoing purification, others still in their glory gazing ‘clear-sighted on God himself, three and one, as He is”.*** Despite the difference of our degree and mode, all of us are in communion with the same

love of God and our neighbour; we all sing the same hymn to the glory of our God. All who belong to Christ and are in possession of his Spirit combine to make one church with a cohesion that depends on him. (Eph.4: 16). The union of the living with their brethren, who have fallen asleep in Christ, is not broken; the Church has rather believed through the ages that it gains strength from the sharing of spiritual benefits. The greater intimacy of the union of those in heaven with Christ, gives extra steadiness in holiness to the whole Church. It gives distinction to the worship the Church is offering God on earth, and makes a manifold contribution to the extension of her building (1Cor 12:12-27). Now that they are welcome in their own country and at home with the Lord (2Cor.5:8), through him, with him, and in him they intercede unremittingly with the Father on our behalf, offering the merit they acquired on earth through Christ Jesus, the one and only mediator between God and man (1Tim.2: 5), when they were at God's service in all things, and in their flesh were completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, the Church (Col.1: 24). Their brotherly care is the greatest help to our weakness.” (Lumen Gentium Chapt.VII. 49)

On the 26th July, are the feast days of two important saints, both of the royal house of David. St. Anne and St Joachim were the grandparents of Our Lord, and the parents of Our Lady. In Hebrew the name “Anna” means “God has given a grace” or more simply “graciousness”. St. John Damascene commented on this and said that “Since it had to be that the Virgin Mother of God should be born of Anne, nature did not dare to precede the seed of grace; but it remained without its own fruit so that grace might produce its own. In fact the firstborn had to be born, from whom the firstborn of every creature would be born.” St. Joachim the father of Our Lady, like St. Anne was a descendant of Abraham, the people formed by Moses, which Exodus describes as “thirsting to know God’s face”. This indeed is the mark of prayer, of contemplation, for which the Tabernacle of St. Francis seeks to shape its members. St. Anne and St. Joachim were very precious links in the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. By their example and upbringing their daughter Mary was trained to be the perfect mother of Christ. We owe much to these two saints who gave their daughter to God. She, under the title of ‘Mother of the Blessed Sacrament’ is one of the Patrons of the tabernacle of St. Francis.

When Jesus told his disciples what he wanted of his followers, he said “*If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*” (Luke 9: 23).” It is the way he lived and wished us to live our lives on earth. Jesus desires our association with his redeeming sacrifice from those who are to be its first beneficiaries. (C.C.C.C. 123) St. Peter Julian Eymard (d.1864) (another of our Patrons} has his feast day on the 2nd August. He was the Founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and is known as the ‘Champion of the Blessed Sacrament’. When giving advice to his parishioners on the best way to participate in the Holy Mass, made the

same point as Christ. If we can follow it, then it will surely achieve in us a deeper love of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He said "***The best method of participating in the Holy sacrifice of the Mass is to unite oneself with the Victim. Act therefore in union with Him, and with the same intention. United to the offering of Jesus Christ, your offering will be ennobled, purified, made worthy of God's attention. Follow Jesus to Calvary, mediating on the events of His Passion and His death. Above all, however, unite yourself with the Sacrifice, joining with the priest in consuming the Victim. Only then will the Mass have its entire efficacy and fulfil Our Lords purpose.***"

During the holy Mass the Church thinks of all those united with her, in fact the whole 'Communion of Saints'. During the Canon she prays for all the faithful, especially for those who are present. Then she thinks of all the saints in heaven and asks God to hear their constant prayers for us and grant us help and protection. After the Consecration she prays for the dead, that God may grant them eternal rest with Him. Being a member of the 'Communion of Saints' carries with it many advantages, and at the same time the responsibility of building up and strengthening its bonds by our prayers and loving deeds. With that goes the need to avoid weakening those bonds by our actions. The Communion of Saints is not yet in its final form. However on the Last Day Christ will bring the Church militant and the Church suffering to join the Church triumphant. The whole great family will then be assembled together with God the Father. At that stage the Communion of Saints will be complete.

On the 30 October 2013 Pope Francis was talking to a large crowd in St. Peter's Square about the Communion of Saints. "*Today I would like to speak about a very beautiful reality of our faith, namely, the "communion of saints"*". It is indeed a beautiful reality of our faith.