

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE



ALL SAINTS

Why the Communion of Saints matters

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The Communion of Saints: A Shared Life in Christ

The Communion of Saints is one of the most beautiful truths of our faith - and one of the most misunderstood. That's partly because the phrase itself can mean different things depending on the context. In the Apostles' Creed, we say: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints..." This isn't just poetic language—it's a profound reality. The Church and the Communion of Saints are deeply connected. But to understand what we're professing, we need to unpack it a little.

1. Communion Through the Sacraments

At its heart, the Communion of Saints refers to the deep spiritual unity we share in the Church, especially through the sacraments. The Catechism puts it beautifully:

"The fruit of all the sacraments belongs to all the faithful. All the sacraments are sacred links uniting the faithful with one another and binding them to Jesus Christ, and above all Baptism, the gate by which we enter into the Church. The communion of saints must be understood as the communion of the sacraments... The name 'communion' can be applied to all of them, for they unite us to God... But this name is better suited to the Eucharist than to any other, because it is primarily the Eucharist that brings this communion about." CCC 950

The sacraments aren't just symbolic gestures. They're real encounters with Christ, instituted by him, that actually do what they signify. Take Baptism: when water is poured and the words are spoken - "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" - it's not just a ritual. It's a spiritual rebirth. The person is washed clean, made new, and grafted into the Body of Christ.

And this is key: the sacraments are never private experiences. They're always communal. Even if you're the only one receiving, you're receiving from the Church, through the Church, and into the Church. You're being drawn deeper into the life of Christ and into communion with every other member of his Body.

This is most powerfully seen in the Eucharist. The Mass isn't just a memorial - it's a mystical participation in the saving events of Christ's life. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist "punches a hole" through time and space. We are placed at the Last Supper, at the foot of the Cross, and in the presence of the risen and glorified Christ. And this happens every time the Eucharist is celebrated - whether in a grand cathedral or a quiet chapel.

So when we speak of the Communion of Saints, we're first speaking of this sacramental communion - a shared life in Christ, made visible and tangible through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

2. Communion Across Heaven and Earth

The second meaning of the Communion of Saints refers to the unity of the Church in all its forms. The Catechism says:

When the Lord comes in glory, and all his angels with him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is.' CCC954

Traditionally, we speak of the Church in three states:

- **The Church Militant** – that's us, the faithful on earth, still battling sin and proclaiming the Gospel.
- **The Church Suffering** – those who have died in Christ but are being purified in purgatory.
- **The Church Triumphant** – the saints in heaven, fully united with God and interceding for us.

These aren't three separate churches. They're one Church, one Body of Christ, existing in different states. And we are united with all of them. When we receive the sacraments, when we pray, when we live our faith, we are in communion with the whole Church: on earth, in purgatory, and in heaven.

This is why the Communion of Saints is such a powerful reality. It reminds us that we are never alone. We belong to a vast spiritual family, stretching across time and space, united in Christ.

3. A Great Cloud of Witnesses

And this brings us to one of the most consoling truths of our faith: we are not alone in our journey. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith. (Rev:7) And they are not distant or disconnected. They are not dead - they are alive in Christ.

Asking the saints to pray for us is no different than asking a friend or fellow parishioner to pray for us, except that the saints are already in perfect communion with God. Their prayers are powerful because they are close to the source of all grace.

Some people wonder how the saints can possibly hear all our prayers. But that's to misunderstand the nature of heaven. Heaven isn't bound by time and space the way we are. The saints participate in God's own life. They share in his vision - the beatific vision. They hear our prayers because God hears our prayers. And it is his grace, perfected in them, that enables them to intercede for us.

The Catechism explains:

Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness... They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped. CCC 956

To ask for the saints' intercession is a good and holy thing. It strengthens the bonds of love between us and our heavenly family. It reminds us that the Church is never just "me and Jesus" - it's always "we and Jesus." We are part of something far bigger than ourselves. When we ask the saints to pray for us, we are forging bonds of holiness with our heavenly brothers and sisters. We are strengthening the familial ties that bind us together as God's holy people.

And of all the saints, Mary holds a special place. As the Mother of God, she shared an intimacy with Jesus that no one else did. Now glorified in heaven, she continues to intercede for us with a mother's love. Seeking her prayers is not only appropriate - it's deeply biblical and profoundly comforting.

4. A Family of Faith

To ask for the saints' intercession is to live out one of the most profound truths of our faith: that God calls us into relationship - not just with him, but with one another. From the very beginning, God's covenant has always been with a people. Abraham was promised descendants as numerous as the stars. Israel was called as a nation. The Church is born as a community. Scripture never presents salvation as a solo journey. It is always communal, always relational.

The Communion of Saints reflects this divine pattern. It reminds us that the Christian life is not "me and Jesus" - it's "we and Jesus." We are not isolated individuals trying to reach heaven on our own. We are members of a body, branches on a vine, stones in a temple, sheep in a flock. We belong to one another because we belong to Christ.

This is why we pray "Our Father," not "My Father." Even in our most personal moments of prayer, we are never alone. We are praying as sons and daughters of the same Father, as brothers and sisters in the same family. And that family includes those on earth, those being purified, and those already in glory.

When we say in the Creed, "I believe in the Communion of Saints," we are professing our unity with every member of Christ's Mystical Body. We are saying yes to the sacraments, yes to the Church, yes to the saints, and yes to the shared life of grace that binds us together. We are acknowledging that our faith is not just personal - it is ecclesial. It is lived in the Church, through the Church, and with the Church.

This truth is especially visible in the celebration of the Eucharist. At every Mass, we are united not only with those present in the pews, but with the whole Church - across time and space. We are joined by the angels and saints, by the souls in purgatory, and by every believer who has ever lived. The veil between heaven and earth is drawn back, and we glimpse the fullness of the Body of Christ gathered in worship.

The Communion of Saints is not a distant doctrine, it is a living reality. It is the heartbeat of the Church. It is the reminder that our faith is never solitary. It is communal, sacramental, and eternal. And it calls us onward - to deeper holiness, to greater love, and ultimately, to join our brothers and sisters in heaven.

To live in communion is to live in love. And to live in love is to live in God. This is the destiny of the Church. This is the promise of the saints. And this is the joy that awaits us.



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Short reflections, eternal truths

All Saints

Uncover the remarkable richness and significance of the communion of Saints - an essential, yet frequently misunderstood aspect of Christian belief. In this pamphlet, Fr Luke sheds light on the phrase as expressed in the Apostles' Creed and examines the deep connection between the Church and the Saints. Explore the spiritual unity nurtured through the sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, and discover how these sacred moments draw believers into a vibrant, communal relationship with Christ and one another. Whether you're searching for understanding or inspiration, this concise guide reveals how the communion of Saints forges a bridge between heaven and earth, welcoming everyone into a shared journey of communion with God.

*"The Shepherd's Voice", pamphlets, booklets and devotional resources from
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Fr Luke Goymour was ordained to the priesthood in 2010. He completed his studies at St Mary's College, Oscott, earning a Bachelor's degree in Applied Theology with Catholic Philosophy from Birmingham University, as well as a *Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureum* (STB) in Catholic Theology from the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. Following ordination, he furthered his education at Heythrop College, obtaining a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology from the University of London. He currently serves as Parish Priest of St Mark's with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen, Ipswich. He is dedicated to teaching and preaching the gospel, with a strong commitment to helping others come to know Jesus Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Faith.