

By  
**Joe Sixpack**



## Mary Stuart & the Communion of Saints

When the death sentence was read to Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots (1542-1567), the unfortunate daughter of James V of Scotland, she remained calm and dignified. She made only one request: that she be permitted a visit from her confessor, who was imprisoned in the same castle. Her request—one that was usually granted to even the most vile criminals—was denied. Instead, the Anglican dean of Peterborough was sent to her with the mission of trying to win her over to the new religion of England. But his enticements and arguments were of no avail.

Very resolutely, she said, “I have been born in the Catholic religion, I have been reared in it, and I will die in it. Never will I quit that blessed communion in which all the members remain united in the life beyond, in which my soul will be remembered after death in prayer and sacrifice.”

She ascended the scaffold courageously and bowed her head to the fatal blow of the executioner’s axe. The final words on her lips were, “Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.”

We quite often forget that Jesus didn’t establish the Catholic Church in Rome alone. When He established the Catholic Church, He established it on three planes: the Church Militant (Catholics on earth), the Church Suffering (Catholics in purgatory), and the Church Victorious (Catholics in heaven).

The communion of saints means that we don’t stand alone, that a continual exchange of spiritual power takes place, that we give and receive daily and support each other in prayer until we become united in our heavenly Father’s kingdom. A father has three sons: one occupies a very high position; the second has passed all his examinations and has taken his degree, but he has no position as yet; the third is still going to school and faces a great deal of work that still lies ahead of him. But all three brothers love, help, and encourage one another. The word “saints” means all the members of the Church on all three planes. The saints in heaven have won their victory to the Church Victorious. Those who have passed their examination (death) but have no positions yet, because they must be purified of all earthly rubbish in purgatory, belong to the Church Suffering. We, for whom earthly work, struggles and hardship lie ahead, are members of the Church Militant.

When you think about it, the communion of saints is set up rather brilliantly! That’s to be expected, though, because God’s a pretty smart Guy. Anyway, there are several things about the communion of saints that are pretty amazing. Firstly, it’s important to understand that we’re *never* alone. Even when it seems as though nobody gives a rip whether we’re dead or alive, we’re

never alone and never without the love of our brothers and sisters who have left this earthly toil ahead of us. We're constantly surrounded by the saints in the Church Victorious and the Church Suffering, even though we can't see them.

How do they show us their love for us? By constantly praying for us. Yes, even the holy souls of purgatory pray for us. Let me give you an example from my own experience.

A former pastor of mine died at age fifty-two. My friend was but a mere six years younger than I at the time. Because I personally believe he was a very holy priest, I'd like to think he went to heaven immediately or almost immediately. So every morning when I do my prayers, I pray *to* him. I know he prays for me when I pray to him, because that's what saints do—we pray for one another. However, I don't know the state of anyone's soul, and I don't know the mind of God. He doesn't take me into His confidence, making me wander this life in faith, just like He does everybody else. So for all I know, my friend may still be in purgatory being cleansed of his imperfections to be made ready for heaven. Therefore, I also pray *for* my priest friend's soul every morning. And guess what? I know he's praying for me from purgatory as well, if he happens to still be there.

Thanks to the communion of saints, we have this huge family. Every single member of this family in heaven and purgatory prays for us and loves us. Hence, we're never alone and never unloved. Brilliant!

I want to point out something else too. Early in this piece I wrote that there were the Catholics on earth, the Catholics in heaven, and the Catholics in purgatory. Notice that I didn't say anything about Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, or any other Christian religion. Do you know why I didn't mention anyone besides Catholics? Well, that's because there aren't any other Christians in purgatory or heaven other than Catholics. That's right.

You see, Jesus only established the Catholic Church. That's not to say the blue haired old lady Baptist down the street, or the Pentecostal preacher across town won't make it to heaven or purgatory. They certainly can, but by the time they get there they will be Catholics.

By contrast, there are no Catholics in hell. Oh, there are billions of souls in hell who called themselves Catholic in this life, but if they died in the unfortunate condition of not being a friend of God (a state of mortal sin), then they're separated from the Church at death and go to hell. The reason the Methodist, Pentecostal and Baptist we talked about become Catholic at death is because they lived their lives according to the limited truths they possessed, and because they didn't know that Jesus established the Catholic Church and that they were obliged to belong to her.

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