Lesson 9: The Communion of Saints

1. Introduction

I. (CCC 946) After confessing "the holy catholic Church," the Apostles' Creed adds "the communion of saints." In a certain sense this article is a further explanation of the preceding: "What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints?" The communion of saints is the Church.

A. Thus, the communion of saints is dependent upon the four marks of the Church:
   1. *One*: The saints are members of Jesus’ one body together.
   2. *Holy*: The union is holy because we are one with Jesus Christ.
   3. *Catholic*: The union is with all Christians everywhere, living and dead.
   4. *Apostolic*: The union is with all Christians everywhere going all the way back to the Apostles themselves.

II. We are one body in Christ, who is the head, and the Spirit, who is the “soul”. Just as Jesus communicates his life and grace to each of us united to him, so too do each of us communicate our goods to each other.

   A. (Col 1:18) He is the head of the body, the church.
   B. (John 15:5) I am the vine, you are the branches.
   C. (1 Cor 12:12-13) For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

III. There are two meanings to the Communion of Saints:

A. Communion of holy or spiritual things.
B. Communion of holy persons.

2. Communion of Holy Things:

I. Communion in the faith:

   A. (Eph 4:4-6) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.
   B. The apostolic faith passed down from the Apostles to our present day. Thus, we see the connection with apostolicity.

II. Communion of the sacraments:

   A. (CCC 950) "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."
   B. Communion of the Saints is directly linked with Holy Communion. Again, we see Jesus, entirely present in the Holy Eucharist, as the source of our communion in the Church.
III. Communion of charisms:
   A. The one holy spirit animates all apostolates, ministries, evangelization, talents, etc.
   B. (1 Cor 12:4-11) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are
      varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the
      same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the
      Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,
      and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith
      by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of
      miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various
      kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one
      and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

IV. Communion in charity:
   A. A Christian is a steward of the Lord’s goods (CCC 952).
   B. We must look aid and support all those in need, materially, financially, emotionally,
      spiritually, etc. Would we turn our back to those in our earthly families?
   C. (Romans 14:7) We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we
      live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we
      die, we are the Lord’s.
   D. (1 Cor 12:18-26) God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.
      If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members,
      yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head
      to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ . . . But God has so arranged the body, giving the
      greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but
      the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer
      together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the
      body of Christ and individually members of it.

I. Communion of Holy People:
   A. (CCC 959) For if we continue to love one another and to join in praising the Most Holy
      Trinity - all of us who are sons of God and form one family in Christ - we will be faithful
      to the deepest vocation of the Church.
   B. Jesus revealed that God is our father. We are the adopted children of God in Christ!
      1. (1 John 3:1) See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children
         of God; and that is what we are.
      2. (Romans 8:15-17) For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but
         you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very
         Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then
         heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that
         we may also be glorified with him.
II. The three states of the Church:
   A. (Lumen Gentium, # 49) 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.
      1. **Church Militant**: those of us on earth still waging battle against the flesh, the world and Satan.
      2. **Church Suffering**: those in purgatory who are making final expiation for their sins.
      3. **Church Triumphant**: those in heaven who have received their full reward. Only a small fraction of those saints in heaven have been officially recognized for the sanctity.
   B. We are all called “saints” by virtue of our baptism (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 1:1) Those in heaven are saints in the full and final sense because they have attained their glory and reward.

III. Communion with the all the saints who have died:
   A. This is a logical conclusion of all that we’ve seen thus far.
   B. Of course we have communion with one another! How can we not? So long as people die in Christ, they are in union with all Christians.
   C. Prayer for the dead in Scripture:
      1. (Romans 8:35-39) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
      2. (Luke 20:38) He is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.
      3. (2 Macc 12:44-46) If he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.

IV. The intercession of the saints:
   A. (Lumen Gentium, # 49) 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.
   B. The saints awareness of earthly events in Scripture:
      1. (Hebrews 12:1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.
      2. (Luke 15:7) Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.
      3. (Rev 8:4) The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.
4. Three Common Objections:

Objection 1: Prayer to the saints is idolatry!

1. No, *latria* is adoration given to God alone. *Dulia* is honor, respect, love given to people.
2. Remember, the saints are more alive than we are and they are concerned for our spiritual welfare. We don’t worship them just by speaking to them!
3. All Christians are required to pray for each other (1 Tim 2:1-4)!

Objection 2: “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim 2:5)

The argument is that Catholics commit a grave sin when they go to Mary and the saints, thereby making them “false mediators” between themselves and God.

1. Christ is indeed the one mediator that cannot be usurped. But, we are members of Christ and thus mini-mediators! The Church has always taught that Mary and the Saints are subordinate to Christ.
2. Read the context! 1 Tim 2:1-4 describe how we must pray for everyone. Why, because we can only pray for others with true efficacy when we are united in Christ!
3. If saints in heaven cannot intercede for us, why can Christians on earth? If this argument were valid, it would be just as sinful for a Protestant Christian to ask someone on earth to prayer for them!

Objection 3: Why go to the saints when you can go straight to God?

1. Again, why do you ask anyone on earth for prayers? We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. God the Father wants his children to love and help one another!
2. Again, we are required to pray for each other (1 Tim 2:1-4).
3. “The prayers of a righteous man avail much.” (James 5:16) In heaven Christians are made perfect (Heb 12:22-24), so their prayers are more efficacious than those on earth.

Take away points:

1. The Communion of Saints is intricately tied with the teachings of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Church.
2. Communion of holy things includes faith, sacraments, charisms, charity, etc.
3. The Communion of holy people includes the three states of Christians: militant, suffering, and triumphant.
4. The fact that we are God’s holy family necessitates prayer and concern for all fellow Christians and human beings.
5. There is no real objection to the Saints’ intercession for us. Start asking for their prayers daily!