*The Communion of Saints, Intercession and the New Testament Scriptures*

By: Deacon Greg Ollick, M.A.T.

One of the most contested teachings of the Catholic Church, in Evangelical Protestant circles, is the doctrine on the Communion of Saints. This brief article seeks to explain this teaching using the New Testament scriptures to defend its validity.

The *Communion of Saints* is the spiritual union that exists between the saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory, and the faithful living on earth. This union is one of grace and good works, and in recognition of this, the faithful imitate, venerate, and pray for the intercession of the saints in heaven and for the souls in purgatory (The Catholic Encyclopedia).

The Church has understood from the beginning that all of the baptized are members of the Body of Christ. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, we were all given to drink of the one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Saint Paul makes it clear that Jesus is the head of this body: “He is the head of the Body, the Church” (Colossians 1:18). As members of the Body of Christ, it is our duty to help one another in every way we can and to pray for each other. We also believe that those who die in the State of Grace are not spiritually dead. The Scripture is explicit that they are very much alive. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor future things, nor powers, nor….principalities, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39).

Jesus, speaking about the souls in heaven, said, “Among those born of woman, there is none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he” (Mathew 11:11). Death does not separate us from the Body of Christ. There are not two churches, one of the living and one of the dead, but one Church. “There is one body…one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). Within the Body of Christ, we are all called to the loving service of one another.

The Church also teaches that when we are finally with our Heavenly Father, he will give us the grace that we will need to intercede for those left on earth. “At present we see only dimly, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. At present I know only partially; then I will know fully, as I am known” (1 Cor 13:12). This is demonstrated in several places in the New Testament. In the Book of Revelation for example, John recalls a vision he had of the events going on in heaven. The souls of those who were killed for their faith at the hands of the Romans were crying out, “How long will it be before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev 6:10)? In Luke’s gospel, Jesus tells a parable about the rich man who had died and is in purgatory. He is pleading with God for his brothers who are still alive: “I have five brothers…warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment… If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent” (Luke 17:28-30). In the 7th chapter of Luke’s gospel, Jesus says that “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents when for 99 righteous people who have no need of repentance” (Luke 15:7).

So, when we pray to the saints, we are absolutely NOT worshiping them. We are simply asking them for their prayers of intercession. They are in heaven and we know that their prayers are powerful. “The prayer of the righteous man is very powerful” (James 5:16). Saint Peter also talks about the power of intercessory prayer: “For the eyes of God are on the righteous and his ears are tuned to their prayer” (1 Peter 3:12).

Jesus’ mother, Mary, is an especially powerful intercessor. This was clearly demonstrated at the Wedding Feast at Cana. Jesus had not planned to intervene in this situation, but his mother stepped in and told him that the young couple had run out of wine at their wedding reception. Though Jesus told her that this was not yet the time for miracles, his mother knew that he would answer her request. That is why she went to the waiters and then simply smiled and said, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). Just as we would ask anyone else to pray for us, we can ask those in heaven (saints) to do the same. This is the Communion of Saints, and it all gives glory to God.

Works Cited

New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>

The Catholic Encyclopedia <www.newadvent.org/cathen/04171a.htm>