

THE BULLETIN

“So the faith was planted: so it must be restored.”

Eight Pond Place, Oyster Bay, NY 11771

November 2023

The Church Suffering and Us

Adapted from a sermon by The Most Rev. Clarence Kelly
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The Catechism of the Council of Trent, quoting St. Augustine, defines the Church this way: It says, “The Church is the faithful of the whole world.” (p. 97) This is the definition of the Church in the narrow sense. In the wider sense of the word, the *Church* refers not only to the faithful on earth, but also the souls in purgatory and the saints in heaven. In this wider sense we say the Church is made up of “...all those redeemed and sanctified by the grace of Christ whether on earth, in purgatory or in heaven.” (Dr. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 314) We usually call the Church in this wider sense the *Communion of Saints*. In the Apostles’ Creed we say we believe in the Holy Catholic Church, that is the Church on earth, and in the *Communion of Saints*. The Communion of Saints is the Church militant on earth, the Church suffering in purgatory, and the Church Triumphant in heaven.

Between the members of the Church on earth, in purgatory, and in heaven there is a bond. This bond unites us in, “...a common supernatural life with the Head of the Church [Who is Christ] and with one another. (Ibid., p. 314) Peter is the visible head of the Church on earth. But Christ is the invisible Head of the Church on earth, in purgatory and in heaven. We are united to Our Lord and to the Holy Souls in purgatory and the saints in heaven. We are intimately bound together. What we do affects each other. This is so true that Pope Pius XII wrote about this in his encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ. He said: “There can be no good and virtuous deed performed by individual members of the Mystical Body of Christ which does not,

through the Communion of the Saints, redound also to the welfare of all.” (Ibid., p. 314) We share in a “... spiritual commonwealth of riches, which embraces all the wealth of graces acquired by Christ, and all the good works performed with the grace of Christ.” (Ibid., p. 314) There exists a unity between the members of the Church. St. Paul said: “And if one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it: or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ and members of member.” (1 Cor. 12:25-27)

From this doctrine of the Communion of Saints, St. Thomas Aquinas draws two conclusions. The first is that “The merit of the redemption of Christ, the Head, is communicated in the sacraments to the members of the Mystical Body.” The second is that “Each member participates in the good works of the other.” (*Exposition of the Creed*, p. 9) Because of the Communion of Saints we can pray for each other, we can merit for each other, and we can win the salvation of the souls of others by our prayers and good works. We can pray for the souls in purgatory, and they can pray for us, even though they are not capable of meriting anymore. We can honor the saints in heaven and they can intercede for us. St. Paul wrote: “I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the church.” (Colossians 1:24) These are amazing words! He says he fills up in his flesh what is wanting or lacking in the suffering of Christ.

But what could be lacking in the suffering of Christ? In itself nothing, but relative to us, our