

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)

What we are doing now. The catechetical process consists of four periods leading to receiving the sacraments of initiation and beyond into a final period called the neophyte year or mystagogy. This first period is called the precatechumenate and will extend until late November when candidates declare their intention to the Church. The first period consists of inquiry on the part of the “inquirer” or “candidates” and of evangelization and the precatechumenate on the part of the Church. During this time, the RCIA team gives a suitable explanation of salvific events and the Gospel and provides an opportunity to experience the company and spirit of Christians in our community. Inquirers are seeking the truth and the team transmits the words and deeds of revelation. There are no liturgical rites in this period because inquirers have not yet entered into a formal relationship with the Church through the Rite of Acceptance. All inquirers have been given a binder full of conversion stories, informational articles about our faith and examples of common Catholic prayers. Many of the questions asked early on are being answered and some are addressed specifically.

Catechism for All of us....

Jonathon, our catechist, reminded us that when we recite the Apostles' Creed, we profess to believe in the “communion of saints”. God has always intended us to live with him in familial love. The communion of saints is his holy human family. Death does not break this bond of loving and sharing. Catholicism teaches that death cannot sever the ties that bind the members of the Church, because the soul is immortal and only the body can die. So we believe that the ties and connections that link us together in life continue in death. The communion of saints is the church; it's the unity of all who have been redeemed by Christ, whether living on earth or having died in God's friendship.

In the communion of saints, “a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things. In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm of that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin. (CCC 1475)

The communion of saints or the *Mystical Body of Christ* can be divided into three stages: The *Church Militant, Suffering and Triumphant*.

The Church Militant are those of us here on earth still working out our salvation; the believers on earth. We are not talking about battling Islam or Al Qaeda here. This battle for the souls of the faithful is raging constantly: “*For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the Heavenly places*” (Eph 6:12) Vatican II described the faithful alive on earth as a Pilgrim People. The Church believes that those still living on earth are on a pilgrimage from this land to the promised land of heaven. Jesus calls us to battle with Satan. We struggle to live and die in holiness to attain the only goal worth pursuing- that is to achieve the beatific vision, God himself.

When we say beatific vision we mean the intuitive knowledge of God which produces heavenly beatitude or happiness in the will and the whole being. The souls of the just “see the divine essence by an intuitive vision and face to face, so that the divine essence is known immediately, showing itself plainly, clearly and openly, and not mediately through any creature”.

The Church Suffering is those souls who have died in genuine friendship with the Lord, but without complete spotlessness from the temporal punishment due for their sins; these are the

souls in purgatory. They are undergoing a final purification in Purgatory which frees them from what is called the “temporal punishment” of sin. This punishment has a **limited and variable duration**; it is the opposite of eternal. This punishment is not to be thought of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God but rather as following from the very nature of sin. Purgatory is the mercy of God. These humans know that they will see God and intensely yearn to be purified before their entry into heaven. They offer their suffering in prayer on behalf of those on earth.

The Church Triumphant are those humans who are already pleasing to God and are sharing in everlasting beatitude with God; the saints in heaven. They have immense intercessory power; they are in heaven near the throne of God after all!

The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and our mother, is our pre-eminent intercessor. Gary Norris spoke to us about Saint Catherine Laboure who was the visionary of the Miraculous Medal. On July 18, 1830, she observed a Marian apparition who asked that a medal be struck with her image so that those who carry one with an indulgence attached and who piously make this short prayer will enjoy the special protection of the Mother of God. That medal contains this prayer to the Blessed Mother: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.” The rays of light emanating from her hands are a symbol of the graces that Mary obtains for all people. He spoke of Catherine’s quiet life of service as a powerful witness of how God can enter our lives. He spoke of her humility, courage and holiness. Miraculous medals were distributed to the enquirers. Although most saints are unknown, some have been canonized to be models for us to imitate. These saints are aware of what is happening to us on earth and respond to our prayers and pray to God in our behalf.

A saint is a person who is in a state of grace united to God and seeking to be perfected in love. Canonized saints are those who have attained, by responding to God’s grace, the perfection of holiness. In the strict sense saints are those who distinguish themselves by heroic virtue during life. We are all called to this holiness and arrive at it in our own way. What is it that saints do? They avoid anything that is an obstacle to God’s grace since they realize that they cannot achieve holiness without it. They are concerned solely with God’s will. They know that by doing God’s will as perfectly as they can, they are imitating the Lord, they are expressing charity, and they are being true to the best of their ability. And they do it for the glory of God. The saints embrace humility and become great, this is the paradox. The path that Jesus took was one of humility. He embraced humility and became the servant of all. Albert Schweitzer said this in a commencement speech: “I don’t know what your destiny will be but the only ones of you that will be happy are the ones that learn to serve. The greatest among you is the one that serves the best”. Remember that humility is the virtue best used to combat the most deadly sin of pride, the sin of our first parents.

Catholics do not worship the saints. We venerate the saints. Veneration is the honor paid to the saints who, by their intercession and example and in their possession for God, minister to human sanctification, helping the faithful grow in Christian virtue. Venerating the saints does not detract from the glory given to God, since whatever good they possess is a gift from his bounty. They reflect the divine perfections, and their supernatural qualities result from the graces of Christ merited for them by the Cross. In the language of the Church’s liturgy, the saints are venerated as sanctuaries of the Trinity, as adopted children of the Father, brethren of Christ, faithful members of his Mystical Body, and temples of the Holy Spirit.

It is not unusual among Catholics to ask a friend to pray for a relative who is dying or to pray for someone going through a difficult divorce....and it is no different to pray to a saint for this same purpose. In light of our discussion of the mystical body of Christ, asking a friend to pray for us and asking a saint to pray or intercede to God for us are not different!

The Church believes that the communion of saints is most fully expressed and experienced during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass-especially at the Consecration and at Holy Communion. The Church believes that heaven and earth are united at that time. The saints in heaven, the

believers living on earth, and the souls in purgatory are all intimately connected and united at the Mass, because the power of Jesus Christ binds them in the first place.

So the communion of saints is a union of incomparable love and hope. The Church of this world is joined to the Church of the next in the single Body of Christ. We have an entire human history of family that *can and will* help us to succeed in becoming saints. As in a physical body we are members in Christ's one body and of each other who have different spiritual functions; to live in love, harmony and fraternal charity. Take a minute to read Romans 12:4-21. This communion of love makes our daily life rich, desirable, fruitful, and meritorious.

Read it for yourself: CCC: 946-959, 1471-1479, 2635, 2636. *Articles are available for review at stgertrude.org; click on "Interested in becoming a Catholic?" on the left column, then scroll to the bottom of the page to "Catechism for Us All" and click on the article of interest.*