

## UNIT ONE: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

### LESSON 3: The Church is Holy: A COMMUNION OF SAINTS [1]

#### CONTENTS OF LESSON:

1. The Church is called a 'Communion of Saints'. We are called 'saints' because we belong to God. 'Saint' (qudosh) means 'set apart for God'. We are part of Christ's Body and the Holy Spirit is living in us. For this same reason the Church is called 'Holy'. [CCC 823, 946]
2. 'Communion' means that we all share in the riches of Christ: faith, sacraments, (especially the Eucharist), charisms, love, even our material possessions. [CCC 947, 949-952]
3. 'Communion' also refers to the connection between the Church in the three states:
  - i) The Church Triumphant: Those in heaven, who see the face of God.
  - ii) The Church Suffering: Those in purgatory, who are being purified.
  - iii) The Church Militant: Those on earth, who are still in the 'battlefield'. [CCC 954, 959, 1023, 1029]
4. Honoring pictures or statues of saints is not equal to idol worship. When we honor the image, we are simply showing our love and respect for these holy people. God desires that we honor one another. [CCC 2130-2131]
5. *Because of our communion, we can ask the saints in heaven to intercede for us. We realize we are never alone, but have a family in heaven. The saints become our companions because this brings us closer to Christ. We can also pray for those who have died. Our prayer for them can help them and us too.* [CCC 956, 957, 958]
6. *We are all called to be holy, to be saints. Even though we often fail, we must keep fighting sin and selfishness and try to love God and love our neighbor with all our hearts.* [CCC 2013]

REFERENCES: saltandlighttv.org; Fr. William G. Most ([www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com).)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts; materials for group presentations.

#### I. STARTER:

- Today we are going to discover some new 'family members'. Before we begin, choose any person in your family (a grandmother, cousin, uncle, brother etc.) and share your relationship with that person: what you do together, how he/she makes your life better in some way, maybe the first memory you have of him/her, how you communicate to each other.

*(After a minute to recollect, students could share with their neighbors or with their group if they are seated as a group. A few students could share with the whole class.)*

#### II. DEVELOPMENT:

- Relatives can make life so much better. Today we would like to introduce some more members of our Church family whom we may not have thought about before.
- In the Apostles' Creed we say, "I believe in the communion of saints" [*Write COMMUNION on the blackboard.*] Look at the word carefully. Can you see any other words in it, which shows us its meaning? [COMMON, UNION, COMMUNE]
- So when we say I believe in the Communion of Saints, it means that we are all one family and share all the good things of Christ. If we all belong to Christ, we possess great riches and at the same time we share these riches with each other. E.g. If your Dad buys a box of sweets, everyone in the house enjoys it, right? So we share all the spiritual riches like our faith, the sacraments, our gifts, even share our material possessions, like the early Church did.
- But what about 'Saints'? [*Write 'OF SAINTS' next to 'COMMUNION'.*] Who are these saints? What does saint mean? [*Students discuss and offer suggestions. Give out the handouts and read the definitions on the left of the diagram.*]
- When we talk about 'communion of saints' we mean saints as St. Paul used it in his letters. The word he used was 'qudosh' which means 'set apart for God'. To be holy means the same thing. So all of us who are baptized are 'saints' in that we belong to God. Of course we have to keep trying to live up to this great call.

- Let us now find out more about our church family. They are dwelling in different states. Study the diagram in the handout. Can you explain the three states of our church family?

*[Students study the diagram and attempt to explain the three states. Sum up as follows, while student complete the sentences on the right of the diagram.]*

1. **THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT:** (In the diagram they are those in the top ‘cloud’.) They represent those in heaven. They are in glory, and see God face to face. They are close to Christ, and never stop praying to him for us, so their prayers are very effective.  
**We can...** ask their help, get to know them and relate to them.
2. **THE CHURCH SUFFERING:** (Represented in the diagram in the part between earth and heaven.) They are the souls in purgatory. They are those who lived in friendship with God on earth, but are not fully purified. The word ‘purge’ means cleanse. Their suffering is not like the suffering of those in hell, but rather has been described as the suffering of someone who has caught a glimpse of Christ and is longing to be with him, but cannot do so yet.  
**We can...** pray for those who have died. Our prayer can help them, since we are all connected; one body. Our prayer helps us also, because we are able to receive the help that they send us.
3. **THE CHURCH MILITANT:** They are of course, all of us still living on earth. (Represented by those in the circle.) We are still in the battlefield, as it were. We have to fight the temptations of the enemy (that’s why we are called militant!) and keep trying to love God and others. We should remain united to our church family on earth too.

### III. ACTIVITY:

*[Refer now to the bottom left-hand corner of the handout. Students work in groups to reply to the questions asked. One person in the group takes the part of the questioner and another responds. Each group gets a chance to present their replies. Make sure the following points come out:]*

1. We consider saints as our family members, because we all have been born into God’s family at Baptism. We believe they are not dead, but with God. If someone praises my mother or brother, I don’t feel angry, but happy. God doesn’t feel angry if we praise each other. In fact the Bible tells us to honor one another.
2. The saints are not robbing from God when they bless us. In heaven, there is no ‘mine’ and ‘yours’, everything is ‘ours’. If your aunty comes to your house to borrow a handi, your mum would not shout at you for giving it to her. It’s the same in heaven. God is happy to use us to bless each other, not only in heaven, but here on earth as well.
3. Praying to saints is like talking to someone on the phone. Even though we can’t see them, we can still talk to them. It does not mean we have made them God.
4. When you go to do a difficult exam, you may ask your mother or a friend to pray for you. In the same way we ask the saints, who are part of our family, to pray for us. Many people have experienced great miracles when they asked the saints for help.
5. Pictures and statues help us to relate to the saints. We do not worship them as God. If your Dad or someone else whom you love has to go away for a long time, you might keep his photo on your table and look at it, or even kiss it. Does that mean you have made him God?
6. God did not forbid us to make any images. In fact he asked Moses to make a bronze snake and the tabernacle with golden angels on it. We are forbidden to make idols and worship them as if the statue itself is God.

### IV. INTERIORISATION/PRAAYER:

*[Read the quote from Pope John Paul II. Ask the students to reflect on it and share their response with their neighbor. They could pray for each other to grow in holiness.]*

**HOME ASSIGNMENT:** ⇨ Read the handout. ⇨ Each group researches a saint of their choice, looking for interesting stories about him/her. They also bring materials for making a chart about the saint. *[Make sure each group has a different saint!]*