

The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints. The Church is the great Christian society founded by Jesus Christ. He established it to conform to those solemn words which He addressed to St. Peter : Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. The Church consists of the Pope, of the Bishops, of the priests, and of all the faithful.

1. We say, in the Creed, the Holy Church, because she is indeed holy and immaculate, (i) in her origin, being the work of God the Son; (2) in her constitutive elements that is to say, in her hierarchical power, her doctrine, her end, which is the salvation of souls, in her means to that end, which are instruction, the Sacraments, and works of mercy.

As regards the body of the Church, it is composed of saints and sinners. Its Head, Jesus Christ, is holy; but its members, who are those believing in the Church, are not all holy. Nevertheless, they all aspire to be sanctified; that is, to triumph over sin, to live and die in sanctifying grace. This is why we say the Holy Church.

2. We also say the Catholic Church, because she is everywhere to be found, and has within her fold faithful of every tongue and of every nation under the heaven.

The Church of Jesus Christ has three branches, or three incomplete Churches: the Church militant, the Church suffering, and the Church triumphant. The first is composed of the faithful on earth; the second, of the souls in purgatory; the third, of the blessed in heaven. These three parts form but one complete Church, one society, one mystical body, one spiritual family whose Head is Jesus Christ, and whose members are all animated with the same spirit, linked by the same charity, and united by a mutual communication which is called the Communion of Saints.

3. By the Communion of Saints we mean the participation of all the faithful in the sacrifice of the Mass, the divine office, the good works and prayers of Holy Church. We may also define it as the union which exists, for time and for eternity, among all the members of the Church, in virtue of which they share each other's spiritual goods, and each one in the spiritual goods of the whole body. Thus, in the human body the members aid one the other, and when the body nourishes itself all the members profit by it.

We say the Communion of Saints, and not the communion of Christians, (i) because the name of Saints is given in the Scripture to all the faithful; (2) because all have been sanctified by Baptism; (3) because all are called to a perfect sanctity, and there are many who have already acquired it.

It has been said in the definition that the Communion of Saints exists for time and for eternity, because the union among the members of the Church, no more than their union with Jesus Christ, is in no wise severed by death.

Thus, my brethren, when death takes from us our parents and friends, we are still united with them by prayers and good works. Let us then never forget them, in order that in our turn, after our departure from this world, we may merit the aid of those who will survive us.

Let us strive, my brethren, ever to live in the state of grace; then we shall be living members of holy Church, and we shall abundantly share in the spiritual goods of the whole body.