



## Communion of Saints

The communion of saints is the spiritual union of the whole community of believers in Christ, living and dead.<sup>1</sup> The theologian Elizabeth Johnson captures the living tradition of this doctrine by describing the communion of saints as “a great historical company, an intergenerational band of the friends of God and prophets that includes the living and the dead, joined in community with the cosmic world, all connected in the gracious, compassionate love of Holy Wisdom.”<sup>2</sup> This company comprises not only canonized saints, long venerated by the Catholic Church, but also ‘everyday saints’; men, women and children, living and dead, who have strived to live lives of simple holiness. Pope Francis refers to these as the saints “next door” where such holiness is present “in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile.”<sup>3</sup>

While descriptive of the human community, both living and dead, this doctrine is also inclusive of the natural world in as much as all these elements comprise the community of life. “Set within the life-giving history of God with the world, the community of the sacred encompasses all creation, past, present and to come, holy people and the whole natural world imbued with God’s blessing, together.”<sup>4</sup> Such a perspective highlights the call for appropriate stewardship that addresses neglect and destruction of that which is sanctified.

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<sup>1</sup> McBrien, R. (1994). *Catholicism*. North Blackburn, Vic.: CollinsDove, p.1236

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, E. (2005). *Friends of God and prophets*. New York: Continuum, p.xx.

<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS. (2018). *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE (REJOICE AND BE GLAD)*. [S.l.]: ST PAULS PUBLISHING, n. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, E. (1999). A Community of Holy People in a Sacred World: Rethinking the Communion of Saints, *New Theology Review*, vol 12, no. 2, p. 16