

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS: LEST THE JOURNEY BE TOO LONG

By ROSE HOOVER

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

IN MY PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH, when the Apostles' Creed was recited every Sunday morning in church, this last paragraph seemed disconnected, as if left-over bits of doctrine not fitting anywhere else were unceremoniously tacked onto the end. My inclination, however, was to recite it all at once, in a single breath, so that the six articles of faith would have seemed to the uninitiated to be only one. Although there was no theological significance that I was aware of in this rush toward the final 'Amen', it expressed, perhaps, a truth not yet grasped on a conscious level. For in reality these six are not isolated fragments at all, but are so intimately related that no one of them can stand without the others in the Christian life. What is more, the relatively humble doctrine of the communion of saints seems to me to be a vital expression of our belief in and experience of the other five.

As it was originally used, the term 'communion of saints' probably signified a sharing in the 'holy things': those mysteries and blessings in which the followers of Jesus participated, including baptism, the breaking of bread, and the hearing of the word of God. It followed that this communion included also the fellowship of God's holy people.¹ More recently, however, there has been a regrettable tendency to limit the communion of saints to an exchange between individuals here on earth and those who have died. Departing from this narrow notion, I would like to consider the doctrine as embracing the living, the dead in Christ and a very broad expanse of 'holy things'.

The communion of saints, kairos and the Holy Spirit

Occasionally—very rarely, I imagine, for most of us—we may be given glimpses of beauty, as if a veil were removed or a shade

opened to reveal something that has been there all along, but which we do not ordinarily have the eyes to see. These glimpses of beauty, whether of our relationship with creation, with another person or with the dead, witness to what will be in the future which is Christ—and in reality to what already is. It is as if we were being allowed to see with God's eyes. In whatever form they occur, as love, as harmony, as peace, as truth, or simply as beauty itself, these glimpses show us our connectedness in the Spirit with these holy ones and holy things and indicate what our stance toward them is to be.

It is in what we might call 'privileged time' that these glimpses of beauty take place. This is time, not in its flow from past through present to future, but time in its fullness. The first sort of time can be expressed by the Greek word *chronos*, chronological time, time which can be measured. For the most part, *chronos* is the way our modern Western culture conceives of time. Privileged time, on the other hand, is more accurately expressed by the word *kairos*, time seen as opportunity. 'Behold, now is the acceptable time', says Paul to the church at Corinth; 'behold, now is the day of salvation'.² Although the New Testament uses both words, *kairos* is used almost twice as often as *chronos*, and in both testaments, biblical time tends to be *kairos* time.

It is time experienced as *kairos* which enables our looking back and our looking forward to be more than merely chronological. In the Eucharist we find the primary manifestation both of this privileged looking back (or *anamnesis*) and a privileged looking forward toward the *eschaton*, or last things. Remembering was, for the Hebrew people, much more than the simple exercise of an intellectual faculty. For one thing, it was primarily a communal action, rather than an individual one. And remembering was closely related to the very reality of what was being remembered. For example, past sins remembered were thereby brought into the present to have power over the sinner.³ Therefore, when Jesus says, 'Do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me' (Lk 22,19), he intends more than a mere chronological looking back over time measurable, but lost. On the contrary, this remembrance carries with it into the present the reality of that past event, so that the present moment becomes an 'acceptable time', the 'day of salvation'.

If *anamnesis* is not just the recollection of an event, neither is it the making present of an episode in its barrenness. In the Christian

context, it is memory healed and the past redeemed. Thus, in the light of the Resurrection, the horror of the cross is transformed and becomes a revelation of the glory of God. John can show Jesus saying, as Judas goes off to betray him, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified' (13,31). This past event, transfigured through the Resurrection, is joined to the present moment by means of the communal remembering of the body of believers, so that we also may be one with the paschal mystery in our communion.

It is significant, however, that the 'memorial acclamation' or *anamnesis* of the eucharistic celebration looks also towards the future. Past and future both become part of the *now*. Indeed we proclaim the fullness of time:

Christ has died;
 Christ is risen [note the present tense: we live in the *now* of the
 post-Resurrection age];
 Christ will come again.

Our communion unites us not only with the past sacrifice of Christ, but also with our future. In his body and blood we have the sign of that consummation of all things, when Christ will come again; and in that sign we may participate even now in the reality to come.

Time as *kairos*, as opportunity, allows us to perceive our own past and future as redeemed in Christ. In ordinary time, our memory, like the Church's collective memory of the Passion, contains fearful and hurtful things, and the future often appears threatening. Memory redeemed and healed, however, transforms the very real pain and evil of the past into liberating signs. In the light of the Resurrection, our own past, like the cross of Jesus, is touched by grace, revealing the beauty and truth that in fact were there, although we did not know it. Our past and those whom we knew and loved are made holy in Christ.

The future, too, is made not only holy, but welcoming. By grace we may experience the validity of Julian's declaration that 'all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well'.⁴ That this redeemed future is in some mysterious way a reality even now is beyond our ability to grasp. But in a *kairos* moment, the knowledge that this is so may be glimpsed, and the fear that can overwhelm our human existence is mercifully eased.

When the fullness of the present moment embraces the past and the future, neither of which is seen as menacing, the *other* is no longer viewed as adversary, rather as one participating with us in the love of God. Because of this, communion becomes possible. In his book, *The go-between God*, John V. Taylor asks:

But what is this force which causes me to see in a way in which I have not seen? What makes a landscape or a person or an idea come to life for me and become a presence towards which I surrender myself? I recognize, I respond, I fall in love, I worship—yet it was not I who took the first step. In every such encounter there has been an anonymous third party who makes the introduction, acts as a go-between, makes two beings aware of each other, sets up a current of communication between them. What is more, this invisible go-between does not simply stand between us but is activating each of us from inside. Moses' approaching the burning bush is no scientific observer; the same fiery essence burns in his own heart also. He and the thorn-bush are caught and held, as it were, in the same magnetic field.⁵

This 'go-between', Taylor concludes, is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who awakens us to the fullness of the moment, to time as opportunity. It is the Spirit who opens our eyes to mystery and to beauty, who introduces us, so to speak, to each other. It is the Spirit in us and between us who brings about communion and without whom there is no communion. In fact, the early Church seems to find the creation of communication and communion intrinsic to the action of the Spirit. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied by an extraordinary gift of communication. And in the trinitarian blessing at the end of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Spirit's particular gift is described as communion: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (13,14). The word *koinonia*, translated here as 'fellowship', can also be rendered 'communion' or 'participation [in]'.

When one participates in the Holy Spirit, there is also a communion with others. Communion with God and fellowship with God's people are inseparable. As we read in the first letter of John: 'That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1,3). Because our communion is with God, we may also be in communion with

others. What is more, we may even go so far as to say that to refuse communion with others is to refuse it with God.

During the Eucharist, which is the primary sign of our oneness, we glimpse that banquet where our communion will be accomplished and where there will be no divisions. By praying the 'Our Father' ('thy Kingdom come . . . forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us'), by offering the sign of peace, and by receiving the body and blood of Christ, we express our *desire* to live in that future where all will be one in Christ and our *willingness* to commune with all who are called. Among those invited to the banquet may very well be our worst enemies. A refusal to sit down with them does not exclude them, but on the contrary, represents our own refusal of the banquet.

The communion of saints, the holy Catholic Church, and the forgiveness of sins

The same Spirit who opened the eyes and heart of Moses to perceive the divine through the burning bush works in us to open our eyes and hearts to each other.

From now on, therefore, [says Paul], we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5,16-18).

The Holy Spirit thus brings into being the community of those who have been redeemed. We are not created for isolation. On the contrary, through Christ who became one of us, we are welcomed as part of the family of God. Our relations in this family include Mary the mother of Jesus, the apostles, the martyrs, the saints throughout the ages, known or unrecognized, and a motley assortment of kin. This is the universal communion of all who have lived, however imperfectly, in Christ, and all who have died in him: all who, by the Spirit of Jesus who breaks down barriers and causes strange tongues to be understood, are one in God, whether or not they are conscious of their union.

From time to time a deep sense of our own belonging to this holy assembly may awaken in us. This may happen, for example,

when we are made aware of the love of God through another person who accepts us as we are and perhaps calls us beyond where we are. It may happen when we are given the grace to see another or to see ourselves with God's eyes. More often, however, we will have to recall the truth of our unity, letting our *anamnesis* become a means for creating communion in the present moment.

When our eyes are enlightened by the Spirit, so that 'we regard no one from a human point of view', when we stand in amazement at the beauty which God sees, then not to forgive is out of the question. Reconciliation is the only alternative for beings who radiate the divine like the burning bush. It is the only option for those who are already fundamentally one. Our ministry of reconciliation is to witness to God's forgiveness with our own and to participate in that reconciliation with God and with God's people which brings everyone into the fullness of communion.

The ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation is basic to the very identity of the Church, herself reconciled by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As God's people we are one even in our sinfulness. Our communion in the holy things necessarily includes communion with each other in mutual repentance and in mutual forgiveness. It is in company with the people of God that we draw near to God and become signs to each other of God's tender mercies.

The communion of saints and the resurrection of the body

Through the Holy Spirit who enables us to be reconciled with God and with each other, we experience and begin to make manifest the redemption of the whole world. This redemption is not limited to the spiritual, but embraces as well the bodily aspects of reality. 'We know', says Paul, 'that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now' (Rom 8,22). In ordinary, chronological time—after the fall, so to speak—we find ourselves alienated from the physical world of which we are a part. Nature, for example, not only provides for us, but destroys us; and we, in turn, pollute the atmosphere and the water, drain the wetlands, replace the forests and jungles with cities. In the cities themselves, there would seem to be an enemy lurking around every corner. Not even in solitude are we safe, for our own bodies betray us.

But if creation groans, it groans 'together', and its groans signal a birth. Paul uses two Greek verbs to indicate this: *sustenazo*, to groan together; and *sunodino*, to suffer in pain (as the pain of

childbirth) together. There is a sense in which the communion of holy ones and holy things encompasses all of God's creation. All cry out in pain as one, and all benefit from the new life of the children of God. Indeed, according to Isaiah, the messianic age is to be one of harmony between all creatures, when the time of groaning will be past:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
 and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
 and the calf and the lion and the fatling together
 and a little child shall lead them . . .
 The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp,
 and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
 They shall not hurt or destroy
 in all my holy mountain;
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea (11,6.8-9).

It is through the resurrection of Jesus that we know that the new age has already been inaugurated. In spite of the very evident remnants of the old, we believe that what was has already been overcome. While it is true that we must wait for the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, Christ's resurrection is the witness to the new life that is ours in him. It is the gage that the earth is already full of the knowledge of the Lord. Karl Rahner puts it this way:

What we call his resurrection—and unthinkingly take to be his own private destiny—is only the first surface indication that all reality, behind what we usually call experience . . . has already changed in the really decisive depth of things. His resurrection is like the first eruption of a volcano which shows that God's fire already burns in the innermost depths of the earth . . . The new creation has already started, the new power of a transfigured earth is already being formed from the world's innermost heart, into which Christ descended by dying. Futility, sin and death are already conquered in the innermost realm of all reality, and only the 'little while' (which we call history 'A.D.') is needed until what has actually already happened appears everywhere in glory, and not only in the body of Jesus.⁶

It is more than obvious that our own resurrection has not yet 'appeared everywhere in glory'. However, while futility, sin and death seem to prevail, we do, even now, catch glimpses of what is

to come, of what, in truth, is already ours. There are graced moments when the harmony of a renewed creation is revealed as already present. It is as if we beheld the heart of reality. At these times, the mutual trust and peace of the messianic age can be directly experienced, if only for a moment.

There are persons whose lives appear to demonstrate in a special way this harmony of what will be. For example, the legends of Francis of Assisi indicate that he was able to enter into the covenant promised in the book of Hosea 'with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground' (2,18). Created things which for others would have been threatening, or for which others would have constituted a threat, were for Francis participants in God's love and therefore related to him in a mysterious way: 'our brother fire', even 'our sister, the death of the body' ('Canticle of the Sun').

Though of a very different style from that of Francis, Ignatius of Loyola was also gifted with vision into the true nature of created things. For him, this vision was expressed as finding God in all things. In the 'Contemplation to attain the love of God', which serves as a transition between the intensity of the Spiritual Exercises and everyday life, Ignatius presents the following point for prayer:

This is to reflect how God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them existence, in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation, in man bestowing understanding. So he dwells in me and gives me being, life, sensation, intelligence; and makes a temple of me, since I am created in the likeness and image of the Divine Majesty.⁷

When we turn to the Spanish, we see that the one making the Exercises is to do more than just 'reflect' on God's indwelling. Ignatius uses here a word which is one of the favourites in his spiritual vocabulary: *mirar*. The exercitant is, like Ignatius himself, to look, to gaze: '*mirar cómo Dios habita en las criaturas . . . y así en mí*'.⁸ Through the grace of God, one is to contemplate the reality of God's presence in physical creation and in one's own being, the very temple of the divine.

Because of this presence, all creation can reveal God. And the human being, fashioned in the image of the Creator, has a special relationship with the rest of creation. During the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, when one becomes vividly aware of personal sinfulness, Ignatius makes this relationship clear:

This is a cry of wonder accompanied by surging emotion as I pass in review all creatures. How is it that they have permitted me to live, and have sustained me in life! Why have the angels, though they are the sword of God's justice, tolerated me, guarded me, and prayed for me! Why have the saints interceded for me and asked favours for me! And the heavens, sun, moon, stars, and the elements; the fruits, birds, fishes and other animals—why have they all been at my service! (Exx 60)

This is the communion of God's holy ones, a sharing of blessings between creation at all levels and the graced sinner. Creation is in complicity with God to pour out goodness and love on this one who is aware of deserving nothing. Not only the angels and saints, but also physical reality—inanimate objects, plants, animals, themselves held in being by God's indwelling—all work together to support the person whom, like them, God has made and continues to sustain.

If nature participates in the brokenness and blessings of creation, so does civilization, or what we might call human creation. In its fallen state, the city always carries with it the risk of misery or menace, both of which are described in scripture, and both of which are more than evident in modern urban life. Even the biblical Jerusalem becomes the menacing city, 'killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent' (Mt 23,37). The book of Lamentations, where the poet-author grieves over the desolation of Jerusalem, provides a description of urban misery to rival anything in twentieth-century journalism:

[Infants and babes] cry to their mothers,
 'Where is bread and wine?'
 as they faint like wounded men
 in the streets of the city,
 as their life is poured out
 on their mothers' bosom (2,11-12).

It is probably easier to envisage in nature the beauty of what will be than it is to picture it in today's cities. As Hopkins writes, 'All is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; / And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell' ('God's Grandeur'). Redeemed, however, the city will become holy, the new Jerusalem, part of the new heaven and the new earth. Here, as in all creation, God will dwell. But God already dwells in the city, as do the saints,

God's holy ones. Because of this, we may become aware, even if momentarily, that as the crowds and buildings surround us, so does the love of God. The same Jerusalem where 'we must pay for the water we drink' (Lam 5,4) is also the site of 'the river of the water of life' (Apoc 22,1). She is transformed into the image of eternal life, where 'death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away' (Apoc 21,4).

To say that the resurrection of physical creation is already a reality is not to claim that pain and brokenness are unreal. Jesus did not treat them as such in others, nor did he experience his own cross as either unreal or unimportant. Indeed, we are faced with a paradox. On the one hand, all is well, for all is in the hand of God and moves toward the future which is Christ and which is with us even now. On the other hand, our world is not as a good and loving God intended it to be. Curiously enough, the vision of the first half of this paradox does not ordinarily make one content with the second half. Glimpsing the beauty of other creatures and our relationship with them in the Spirit, one can no longer deny that something more is possible: something more than destitution, war, the destruction of the environment; more than sickness, alienation, death. This knowledge can be unsettling. According to Jürgen Moltmann:

Christianity is completely and entirely and utterly hope . . . For the Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ and reaches out towards the promises of Christ's universal future. But that means that the hoping person can never come to terms with the laws and necessities of this world. He can never come to terms with the inescapability of death or with the evil that continually breeds evil. For him the resurrection of Christ is not merely consolation in suffering; it is also the sign of God's protest against suffering. That is why whenever faith develops into hope it does not make people serene and placid; it makes them restless. It does not make them patient; it makes them impatient. Instead of being reconciled to existing reality they begin to suffer from it and to resist it.⁹

In no case, therefore, may we ignore the sufferings of the world in which we live. There are things which can and must be changed in order to make the promised beauty and harmony more visible in everyday life. And because the essential oneness of God's people

is actual as well as potential, how can we be other than peacemakers, healers, bearers of mercy and justice? Nevertheless, when all is said and done, there is brokenness which we cannot fix. There is pain beyond our ability to alleviate. Where we have done what can be done, our communion may imply simply gazing in helplessness and in reverence before the mystery of one who suffers.

It is here that we encounter a second paradox, one which originates in the first. Ignatius and Francis both passed by the way of the cross in order to reach that luminous awareness of God in all things and the relatedness of all creatures. But this must be said carefully, as it has in the past been readily translated into a glorification of suffering contrary to scriptural tradition. God's will, after all, is the elimination of death, grief and pain (Apoc 21,4). It is not by chance, however, that Ignatius's contemplation of God's indwelling in creation comes only after deep prayer on the passion and resurrection of Jesus, or that Francis's love of nature coexists with a profound devotion to, even union with Christ crucified.

Eloi Leclerc, a twentieth-century descendant of Francis of Assisi, concludes his book-length study of the 'Canticle of the Sun' by recounting a personal experience. Near the end of World War II, he and a few of his Franciscan brothers were among thousands being transported by train from Buchenwald to Dachau. It is not necessary to describe the cruel conditions of this voyage, during which hundreds died. It will suffice to quote Leclerc who says, 'Everything we can see, every experience we must undergo, tells us we are in the grip of an iron law, handed over to the play of blind forces—and that this, and this alone, is reality'. It is, he adds, 'reality where the Father has no place!' and, 'Black night fills our souls'.¹⁰

On the twenty-first day of a trip which should have taken only a few days, the small group of Franciscans in the packed coal car gathers around one of their brothers who is dying and sings, with Francis, of brother sun, sister moon, brothers wind and air, and 'those who grant pardon for love of you'. Surprisingly enough, the song is not forced. 'It rises spontaneously out of our darkness and nakedness, as though it were the only language fit for such a moment' (p 234). What has happened? Simple acts of human kindness and ordinary things of nature have taken on a new significance, point to something beyond themselves.

Where do they come from, this purity and innocence that suddenly lay hold of us through these humble realities? Whence the limpid radiance that bathes the world but is perceptible only amid extreme poverty? . . .

The purity and innocence do not originate in us. They do, however, well up within us, at the deepest level of the soul, and when they do, they restore childhood there. It is not our gaze that brings them into being; on the contrary, it is they that enable us to see things once again as children do. But this purified vision is attained only through a kind of agony, when we have become poor enough to welcome such purity and innocence. What chaos we must have within us if we are to see the world born once again into the light! It is always in the shadow of the crucified Christ that the Christian, at the end of his journey, recovers the vision of a child (pp 235-36).

Leclerc, having been through the horrors of the concentration camps and the hell of a voyage such as this, does not romanticize suffering or seek it out. But his small group had seen a beauty beyond the pain and evil which had threatened to become for them the only reality. When their brother died, he says, 'a supernatural peace had filled our hearts' (p 236).

The communion of saints and life everlasting

A casual reading of scripture, as well as a glance into our own inner being, should be sufficient to convince us of the extent to which fear is prone to take hold of the human heart. Even when our lives are relatively free of difficulty, we tend not to be at ease. God, it seems, must constantly reassure us. Over and over God says, in one way or another, 'Do not be afraid' (see Isai 43,1; Lk 1,30). Perhaps the deepest fears of the human heart are the fears of rejection and of annihilation. In fact, rejection is a manner of annihilation and annihilation a radical form of rejection. The communion of saints mitigates both of these fears. It is a way in which God tells us, through his holy ones and holy things, not to be afraid. First, communion is always an experience of acceptance; and acceptance in the Holy Spirit by another being is nothing less than a sign of the unconditional acceptance of God. We are welcome in the world; we are welcome among the company of God's people; and we are welcome in the love of God.

Second, the communion of saints is a witness to that acceptance and love which literally keep us in being. Of course, this continuation of existence is manifested by the continued existence of the

saints themselves. But more than that, we are shown that we are loved far too much to be annihilated. The family of God, to which we belong, is not like many families, who for one reason or another stop loving each other. Those who have gone before us persist in caring for us. Their love for us is greater now than when they were in this life. Rahner says that when we pray for the dead, they are also praying their own prayer for us. He imagines them praying like this:

Lord, grant eternal rest to them whom we love—as never before—in your love . . . and may your perpetual light shine on them as on us. May it shine upon them now as the light of faith, and then in eternity, as the light of blessed life.¹¹

So those who have died remain connected to us. They have entered into the life of God and, as Rahner says, 'are silently summoning' us to enter into God's life.¹² They have arrived at home, where we will one day be with them. Our communion with them, the sharing of blessings between living and dead, reveals that, indeed, they have not entirely departed from us. Once again, we may be given glimpses of this truth which our memory may carry with us into ordinary time. More often, we may have to rely on the collective experience of the Church in its *anamnesis* of those who have gone before us.

Of what use, might we ask, are our experiences of communion, our glimpses of what is and what will be? On the one hand, the question itself seems ungrateful, as if one were inquiring about the usefulness of a brilliant sunset. We have already seen that the life and love of those who have died are signs to us that we are loved and held in being by God. Besides this, our union with God's holy ones incites us to forgiveness and love of others. The gifts of God, however, are very purposeful, and the communion of saints has another and very practical function in the divine plan.

When Elijah, discouraged and afraid, fled into the wilderness, an angel brought him food, touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you'. Elijah ate, 'and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God' (1 Kg 19,7.8). So for us, our moments of communion, our glimpses of beauty, become food for the journey. They are our *viaticum*. Without them, the journey would be too long; but through *anamnesis*, these glimpses can sustain us and carry us forward toward the mountain of the Lord.

Jesus, too, both needed and was given special moments of communion with God and with others. Four obvious times of communion in the life of Jesus were his baptism, his stay in the desert, his transfiguration and his Last Supper. At his baptism, the communion was with God: he heard the accepting and affirming voice of the Father saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Mt 3,17). Jesus was also given a glimpse into the truth of his own identity before God, as our glimpses suggest to us the graced nature of our being. He went in the strength of this spiritual food for forty days and forty nights, and was sustained through difficult temptations.

At the end of his forty days in the desert, Jesus's communion was with non-human holy ones. We are told that 'angels came and ministered to him' (Mt 4,11). At the transfiguration, Jesus communicated with Moses and Elijah, who had gone before him. What is more, Peter, James, and John were given an extraordinary glimpse of the beauty of Jesus. And at the Last Supper, the communion of Jesus was with his friends. We can imagine that on each occasion he was given the nourishment he needed at the moment.

One of the Church's prayers for the dying person who has just been anointed and has received communion contains the following petition:

May our brother (sister) N.,
 who has been refreshed with food
 and drink from heaven,
 safely reach your kingdom of light and life.¹³

Like Elijah, like Jesus, we are given the food we need for our journey. We are fed, and we are drawn toward and into the Kingdom of God—which lies before us, but which, in truth, is already here within us and among us. And like the last paragraph of the Apostles' Creed, nothing is unconnected in the rush to the final 'Amen'. No, God's creation is not made of isolated fragments, but moves together in the Holy Spirit to that fulfilment when all will be one in God, and God will be all in all.

NOTES

The author dedicates this article to Arthur and Catharine Evans.

¹ In both the Greek and Latin versions the clause is ambiguous. The word *sanctorum*, because it can be construed as either masculine or neuter, may be the genitive plural of *sancti* (Gk.

hagioi meaning 'holy persons'—'saints') or the genitive plural of *sancta* (Gk. *ta hagia*, meaning 'holy things').' Jan Milac Lochman, *An ecumenical dogmatics: the faith we confess*, trans David Lewis (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p 209.

² 2 Cor 2,2. All scripture references are from the Revised Standard Version, *The new Oxford annotated bible with the apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³ See A. G. Herbert, 'Memory', *A theological wordbook of the bible*, ed Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp 142-43.

⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1978), p 225.

⁵ *The go-between God* (London: SCM Press, 1972), pp 16-17.

⁶ *The eternal year*, trans John Shea, S.S. (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), pp 91-92.

⁷ *The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola, 1951), p 235. References are to the marginal numbers.

⁸ *The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, Spanish and English*, trans J. Rickaby (London, 1915).

⁹ *Experiences of God*, trans Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp 11-12.

¹⁰ *The canticle of creatures: symbols of union*, trans Matthew J. O'Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1977), pp 233, 234.

¹¹ *The eternal year*, pp 143-144.

¹² *Encounters with silence* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman, 1960), p 58.

¹³ *The rites of the Catholic Church* (New York: Pueblo, 1976), p 642.

The Communion of Saints teaches us that the church transcends time. So what exactly does the phrase "communion of saints" mean? Let me break it down for you. The word "communion" translates the Greek word *koinonia*. To say that we believe in the communion of saints means that we believe there exists an intimate connection between all true believers in Jesus. We can say it this way: Everyone who belongs to Jesus belongs to me, and I belong to them. I draw a simple conclusion from this: Our fellowship ought to be as wide as the whole body of Christ. We're no longer alone in the darkness of sin and rebellion. Once we begin to grasp this, all our relationships will be radically changed. We may be sinners, but we are sinners saved by God's grace.