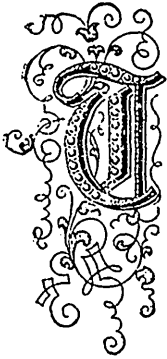


THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

By the Very Rev. Aeneas McDonell Dawson, V.G., LL.D.



HERE can be nothing more conducive to peace, joy and happiness at this joyous season of Christmas, than a serious consideration of the great and sublime fact of the Communion of Saints. The members of the church militant on earth have communion with one another in all circumstances and in defiance of every hindrance. They may have no outward personal relations, they may be separated by vast continent and tempestuous oceans, but are still in close communion. They partake of the same spiritual, life-giving, bread, and the same spiritual wine of gladness, they are held by the same tie of faith and the holy bond of prayer. There may be sin in this "Kingdom of God" as the church militant is sometimes termed in Scripture—"necesse est ut veniant scandala." But hence communion is only closer. The devout and fervent surround with their love the erring brother, and pray with redoubled earnestness that scandal may be swept away. The church triumphant awaits them in Heaven and holds communion with them by continual prayer that they may be cheered, consoled and aided in their wayfaring here below. They mourn over their losses and rejoice when they conquer in "the fight that is set before them." "There is joy in Heaven among the angels of God," and the happy souls that are associated with them over the conversion of a sinner; and from this it may be learned how important is even one soul in the sight of God when all Heaven is moved on his return to virtue and holiness. What better proof could there be of the Communion of the Saints in Heaven with "the Kingdom of God" below,—of Heaven with earth, than this rejoicing of the celestial hosts? The

practice of the church in addressing the saints individually and often collectively the chosen souls of every tribe and tongue and people, teaches that there is Communion of the Saints in glory with their brethren of the church militant. We pray to them that they would aid us with their prayers; and being thus taught by the religion of our Divine Teacher, we cannot doubt but they share with the angels the loving task of offering our humble supplications as a sacrifice of sweet odour in their golden censers before the throne of God. "When He opened the book, the four living creatures and the twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden phials full of odours which are the prayers of the Saints." (Revelations v. 8) In the Prophet Zachary we find the following words: "The Angel of the Lord answered and said: O Lord of hosts, how long will Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah against which Thou hast had indignation these three score and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good and comfortable words." Here, surely, was prayer and a favourable answer to prayer,—an answer which implied that the mercy prayed for by the angel was graciously granted. (Zach. i., 12, 13) The saints in Heaven having no need to ask for themselves, as they already possess all that even Seraphs can desire, cease not to offer prayers for their brethren of the church militant whom they love as only the blessed in Heaven can love. "Another angel," writes the inspired Saint John, "stood at the altar having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne; and the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." (Rev. iii., 3, 4) Who, therefore, would not