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Part 2

The Church Is Holy

Why is the Church holy? Why is she different than other organizations that do good things? This part answers those questions.

Unlike any other organization, the Church is made up of a human and a divine element. The divine element can be seen with the eyes of faith. The eyes of faith tell us that the Church is holy because she was created by the most holy God, who has given her the gifts to be an instrument of salvation, and because the Holy Spirit dwells in her. The holiness of the Church on earth is real yet imperfect because her members cannot be perfectly holy in this life even though they take steps toward holiness.

The Church depends completely on the free gift of God's grace to be holy. Through this grace we are prepared to respond to God's invitation of love and able to grow in holiness.

The Church recognizes the power of the Holy Spirit as she identifies certain people as saints to serve as models of holiness for us. We also pray to the saints to intercede for us or others with God. Mary, who by God's grace is perfectly holy, is the model toward which all other Church members strive. She responded perfectly to the Father by agreeing to be the Mother of the Father's only Son, Jesus.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- "Why Is the Church Holy?" (page 80)
- "The Church Makes Us Holy through God's Grace" (page 84)
- "The Communion of Saints" (page 87)
- "The Saints: Models and Intercessors" (page 89)
- "Mary: Perfect Model of Holiness" (page 92)

20 Why Is the Church Holy?

We know we live in a world of both good and evil. Why is the Church holy if she is obviously part of this sinful world?

The Church Is Both Human and Divine

Let's explore a truth about the Church that helps us to understand her holiness. She is one but is made up of two elements, one human and one divine. We see the human, visible reality of the Church in such things as people gathered for the Eucharist; the church buildings; the Pope, bishops, and priests; young people praying on retreats and serving others; the Bible; and so on.

But the Church is more than what we can see. The Church also has an invisible dimension as a bearer of divine life. This is a mystery that we see only with the eyes of faith. It builds on the visible reality. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the aspects of the Church that we can see communicate and put us in touch with the divine dimension of the Church.

The Holy Spirit assures us that the Church is carrying out Christ's mission, despite the sins and failures of the members. Through us God is doing what we could never do on our own. Our work is participation in the real, but unseen, divine life of the Trinity. The earthly structure of the Church exists for the sole purpose of sanctifying the members or making them holy.

When we understand the true nature of the Church as human and divine, we see that she is not limited to her visible aspects, and we recognize the source of her holiness. The Church is holy because the most holy God created her. Christ, her Bridegroom, loves her and gave up his life for her to make her holy (see Ephesians 5:25–26). He also joins himself to her as his Body and gave the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Spirit of holiness gives the Church her life.

The Church Is Holy Because She Has God's Holy Gifts

The Church is holy because she is united with Christ and he has given her the means of salvation. In other words, God has given her the gifts that enable her to sanctify. She is his instrument of salvation. Christ has gifted the Church, for example, with the Holy Scriptures, the Sacraments, models of holiness, the leadership of the Apostles and their successors, and everything else that is required for salvation.

The Call to Holiness

The holiness of the Church on earth is real but imperfect. Christ calls all members of the Church to perfect holiness, but this perfection always lies in the future and cannot be fully achieved in the present. Perfect holiness will be achieved in Heaven, the state of supreme and definitive happiness with the most Holy Trinity and the Communion of Saints that is the ultimate fulfillment of all human longing.

Love is at the heart of holiness, and encounters with human and divine love can give us glimpses into what eternal communion with God might be like. Love is the means

Live It!

The Desire to Be Holy

We have all felt the pressure to go along with the crowd and accept the standards of the culture. But once a person gets a true taste of the life of holiness, he or she will want to live it more and more. Many worldly promises are ultimately false and hollow; only holiness brings true and lasting happiness.

Here are a few practical steps for building up an increasingly holy life:

- **Take time for prayer, reflection, and worship.** It is difficult to grow in holiness when we are caught up in the "busyness" of the world, causing us to lose the big picture of life's true meaning.
- **Choose your friends wisely.** If you choose friends who are serious about living a holy life, their example will rub off. A true friend will challenge you to become even more holy.
- **Fill your heart and mind with holy things.** We live what is in our hearts and imagination. So if we deliberately choose to read holy literature, watch inspiring movies, or listen to spiritual songs, our hearts will become holier, and our actions will reflect that inner change.

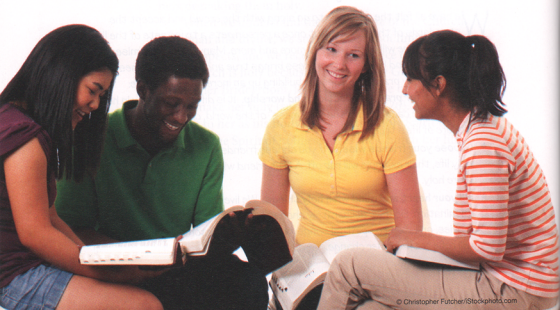
by which the Church sanctifies her members. We encounter the love of God in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in personal prayer, in relationships with loved ones, and in learning about the faith. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux describes love as the principle vocation or calling of each person. The more specific vocations, such as priesthood, consecrated life, or Marriage are different ways to live out the calling to love.

Holiness and Sinners

Despite the holiness of the Church, her members include sinners. In fact all of the members of the Body, including her leaders, are sinners. Because the Church sanctifies, it is natural that she embrace sinners. Her holiness lies in the truth that with Christ and in Christ, she is fully focused on saving people from sin. The presence of sinners in the Church does not detract from her holiness.

Recall Jesus' parable of the weeds among the wheat (see Matthew 13:24–30) in which an enemy plants weeds in the same place where the farmer sowed his wheat. Although his slaves ask if the farmer wants them to pull the weeds up, the farmer says to wait until harvest to separate them. His concern is that if the slaves pull out the weeds, they might

One way we can grow in holiness is through reading and praying with the Scriptures. What opportunities for growing in holiness are available to you in your school or parish?



pull out some of the wheat as well. Each of us is a mix of wheat and weeds within. “In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time. Hence the Church gathers sinners already caught up in Christ’s salvation but still on the way to holiness”¹ (CCC, 827).

Affirming the Church’s holiness and her role in sanctifying people is not to say that members of the Church do not need to constantly do penance and seek purification and renewal. Repentance and **conversion** are important means of growing in holiness. They involve sorrow for and abhorrence of the sins we have committed and the intent to avoid sin in the future. The Church calls all her members to a “second conversion.” The first occurs with the forgiveness of sins and the gift of new life at Baptism. This second one is a lifelong effort to hear Christ’s call to conversion and become increasingly holy. ✚



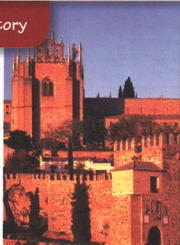
conversion

A change of heart, turning us away from sin and toward God.

The Church’s Role within History

The mysterious aspects of the Church can be seen only with the eyes of faith and cannot be fully comprehended by humans. However, the accomplishments of the Church throughout history are visible signs of this divine reality of salvation. Consider just a few examples. Following the example of Jesus the healer, the Church has always been active in health care. Early on, the Church played a central role in the development of hospitals. Through the centuries many religious orders have dedicated themselves to the care of the sick. Today in the United States alone, there are 624 Catholic hospitals.

The Church’s monasteries played a major role in preserving knowledge throughout the late ancient and medieval periods, studying and copying not only the Scriptures and Church writers, but also classical philosophy and literature. In the Middle Ages, the Church was a great patron of the arts. Pope Julius II, for example, commissioned Michelangelo’s great paintings in the Sistine Chapel. These are only a few of the outward manifestations of the hidden sources of healing, knowledge, and creativity that lie within the mystery of the Church.



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21 The Church Makes Us Holy through God's Grace



grace

The free and undeserved gift of God's loving and active presence in the universe and in our lives, empowering us to respond to his call and to live as his adopted sons and daughters. Grace restores our loving communion with the Holy Trinity, lost through sin.

supernatural grace

Transcending the power of human intellect and will.

You are likely familiar with the spiritual song "Amazing Grace." In this article we explore how truly amazing grace is.

As we have discussed already, each member of the Church is called to be holy. Jesus said, "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). To grow in holiness, we must make conscious choices to respond to the Holy Spirit through prayer, reading the Sacred Scriptures, and receiving the Sacraments, the Eucharist in particular. But it is important to remember that the holiness of the Church and of each member is the result of God's grace, not of our human efforts. **Grace** is the free and undeserved gift of God's loving presence in our lives. It enables us to respond to his call to be his adopted sons and daughters. Grace enables us to participate in the life of the Trinity. Grace is **supernatural**. In other words, it transcends the power of human intellect and will. Because it is supernatural, grace cannot be known except by faith. We cannot rely on our feelings or experiences to recognize God's grace. We can, however, see the results or fruits of God's grace at work in us and in the lives of holy people.

It Is All about Grace

The Holy Spirit always makes the first move in our lives. If the Holy Spirit did not prepare us beforehand to receive and cooperate with his grace, we would never choose on our own to seek after him and his holiness. Recall that in creating us, the Father placed the desire for him alone in our hearts. The gift of grace, a response to this longing, enables us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to grow in holiness and avoid things that separate us from God. Yet, we are given freedom along with grace, so how we respond to the gift of grace is up to us. When we choose in freedom to cooperate with grace, we are at our best, perfecting our God-given potential to form loving relationships with God and others. Grace brings with it the gifts we need to work with the Holy Spirit and to help in the sanctification of others and in the building of the Church.

Specific Types of Grace

The Holy Spirit gives the Church specific types of grace.

Sanctifying grace is God's free and generous gift, sometimes called the "state of grace." It brings about a change in us that orients us to God and helps us to respond to his call. It is infused by the Holy Spirit into our souls to free us from sin and to make us holy. Through Baptism we receive sanctifying grace and a share in the divine life. Sanctifying grace is a habitual grace, meaning that it is a stable and supernatural disposition. It is always with us, helping us to live according to God's will.

Habitual grace therefore differs from another kind of grace called **actual grace**. Actual grace is the name for God's interventions that can come at the beginning of the conversion process and during the everyday moments of our lives.

There are other types of grace as well as those mentioned. There are **sacramental graces**, gifts that come from the particular Sacraments. Grace comes to us through the Sacraments because Christ instituted them and works through them. Each Sacrament gives us grace in a unique way. For example, the Sacrament of Matrimony gives couples the grace to love one another with the love with which Christ loved his Church, perfecting their human love and strengthening their unity. The graces of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation enable us to have a peaceful conscience and increase our spiritual strength to resist temptation.

The charisms discussed in article 9, "The Holy Spirit Gifts the Church," are special graces of the Holy Spirit. All graces are at the service of love and building up of the Church. Graces of state accompany people in their specific vocations to live a Christian life and to minister within the Church. The Holy Spirit gifts parents as they do their best to raise their children. He inspires a hospital chaplain to know what to say or how to pray when ministering to someone who is dying.



sanctifying grace

The grace that heals our human nature wounded by sin and restores us to friendship with God by giving us a share in the divine life of the Trinity. It is a supernatural gift of God, infused into our souls by the Holy Spirit, that continues the work of making us holy.

actual grace

God's interventions and support for us in the everyday moments of our lives. Actual graces are important for conversion and for continuing growth in holiness.

sacramental grace

The gifts proper to each of the Seven Sacraments.

Types of Graces

- sanctifying grace
- habitual grace
- actual grace
- sacramental grace
- special graces (charisms)

God's grace will not automatically make us holy without our cooperation. We must make a real effort to work with God and to fight against the temptation to do things that separate us from God, such as going along with the crowd or doing things we know are wrong. It is a struggle to work toward holiness, but the end result—true peace and joy and everlasting life—makes the struggle infinitely valuable. †

John Paul II and Purifying Memories

Have you ever owned up to something you have done wrong? It can be difficult and humbling, but it is important. The Church realizes that her members have sinned in the past and desires that they honestly face up to those sins. Over a decade ago, Pope John Paul II called for a purification of memories, a process in which both Catholics and non-Catholics would study their shared past together, honestly admit wrongs, and ask one another for forgiveness. At a Day of Pardon Mass in the year 2000, the Pope asked for God's forgiveness for these wrongs over the last two thousand years:

- sins that have led to division in the Body of Christ
- sins against the people of Israel
- sins that have violated the rights of ethnic groups or not respected their cultures and religious traditions
- sins against the dignity of women



22 The Communion of Saints

When we recite the Nicene Creed at Mass, we profess our belief in the Communion of Saints. This refers to the Church. The Church is a communion of holy people, living and dead (but alive with God). There is a second, closely related, meaning of *Communion of Saints*. The English *saint* can translate the Latin *sancti* ("holy people") and the Latin *sancta* ("holy things"). The holy things are primarily the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. When we profess belief in the Communion of Saints, we say something about our relationships with all faithful people living now and in the past, but that is not all. We are also saying that "holy things"—especially the Eucharist—bind us to one another and unite us to God. When we participate in the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, we are nourished with the Body and Blood of Christ, and we become the Body of Christ for the world.

Love, by its very nature, brings communion to the Body of Christ. Saint Paul says in his Letter to the Romans,

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Purgatory

A state of final purification or cleansing, which one may need to enter following death and before entering Heaven.

“None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself” (14:7). Every act of love, no matter how small, builds the communion.

The Three Stages of Sanctification

The Church is a Communion of Saints who exists in one of three stages of sanctification:

- the faithful, followers of Jesus, here on earth
- the faithful who have died and are being purified and made holy in **Purgatory** to join God in Heaven
- the faithful who have already attained the perfect holiness and glory of Heaven, seeing God as he is

The communion that Christ has given the Church through the Body of Christ enables the boundaries between the living and the dead to be surpassed by life in the Holy Spirit. The living and the dead benefit from each other spiritually through their prayers. As we are drawn closer to the saints in Heaven through our veneration of them, we are also drawn closer to Christ.

We pray for those who have passed away from this life; our prayers help them as they are purified of the effects of earthly sin in their journey through Purgatory to the fullness of the heavenly life. We especially remember the faithful departed by offering the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass for them. ✠

Pray It!

Praying in the Communion of Saints

It is good to have prayers by the saints nearby for different situations you may face. You may at times find yourself at a loss for words and ready for an established prayer that you know is appropriate. Here is one from Saint Catherine of Siena, a Doctor of the Church. You can use it when you are short on time or patience!

Lord, take me from myself and give me to yourself.

Connecting Heaven and Earth in the Mass

Next time you participate in the Mass, notice the strong connection between the saints in Heaven and the saints on earth in our Eucharistic prayers. We pray for our past loved ones: "Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again; bring them and all the departed into the light of your presence" (Eucharistic II). We know that our prayers and worship are joined with the prayers and worship of those in Heaven: "And so we join the angels and saints in proclaiming your glory" (Eucharistic II).

23 The Saints: Models and Intercessors

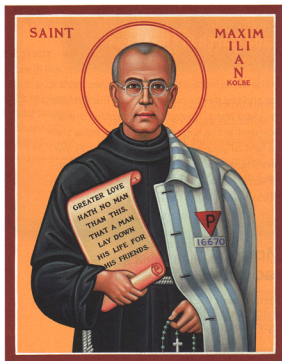
Because the Church is holy, all members of the Church are saints or holy ones. So why does the Church give only certain people the official title Saint?

The Church recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in certain people and holds them up as examples to the rest of us. These deceased people lived a life of extraordinary holiness or died for their faith. The holiness of the Church shines more clearly in their lives. Saints inspire us to grow in holiness and nourish our hope in good on earth and in eternal life.

Saints Are the Face of Christ in the World

Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, CMF, the Prefect (head) of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican, wrote a document that includes this excerpt, which summarizes why saints are so important in the Church:

To understand the Church, we need to be acquainted with the saints who are her most eloquent sign, her sweetest fruit. To contemplate the face of Christ in the changing, diversified situations of the modern world, we must look at the saints who are "the living reflection of the face of Christ," as the Pope reminds us. The Church must proclaim the saints and she must do so



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Notice the concentration camp uniform draped over the shoulder of Saint Maximilian, recalling his loving sacrifice. Many people are inspired to live holier lives because of his example. Who are the saints that inspire you to live a holy life?

have been sources of renewal for the Church in difficult times. In the fourth century, for example, Saint Athanasius championed the orthodox Christian faith when many were led astray by the Arian heresy. Martyrs such as Saint Maximilian Kolbe, who took the place of another man about to be executed in a concentration camp, are great examples to us of people who were not afraid to lay down their lives for Christ's sake.

The Saints Intercede for Us

Saints are so closely united to Christ in his heavenly glory that they can intercede or pray to God on our behalf in a special way.

We honor or venerate the saints and ask for their prayers. The saints do not take the place of God, however. We do not pray to them. Nor does our honoring the saints suggest that we cannot pray directly to God or that we need the saints as intermediaries. We ask the saints to pray for

in the name of that proclamation of holiness that fills her and makes her, precisely, a means of sanctification in the world

("Reflection by Cardinal José Saraiva Martins," 2)

As we learn about saints or read their writings, we see holiness in action in real life. Those saints whose lives share common elements with our own may be particularly inspiring for us.

Saints Are Models of Holiness

As models of holiness, saints encourage others. Throughout history saints

us, just as we might ask a friend to pray for us when we are going through a difficult time.

We associate some saints with particular needs. If you have ever searched your room for something lost, you know that you wouldn't mind some help. Pray for the intercession of Saint Anthony of Padua for help in finding lost items! Pray for the intercession of Saint Blase when you have a sore throat and Saint Teresa of Ávila for help with headaches.

Learning about the saints can be very inspiring. Come February, everyone is talking about Saint Valentine, whose feast day is February 14. It may not surprise you that he is the patron saint of engaged couples and happy Marriages. Did you know, however, that he was a Roman priest martyred in the third century?

Honoring Saints through the Liturgical Year

The Church honors Mary, especially, because of her link to the saving role of her Son, on special days such as the Feast of the Assumption on August 15. The Church honors saints on fixed days of the year. Honoring the saints with the whole Church reminds us of the Paschal Mystery visible in their lives, exposes us to holy people, and unites us with the liturgy of Heaven, which is constant praise of God as is revealed in the Book of Revelation.

The examples of the saints inspire us, teach us, and help us to see what it means to live like Christ. At Confirmation you often choose a saint's name as your Confirmation name

Catholic Wisdom

Heavenly Intercession

Many saints have had a strong sense while they were living that they would still be able to help those on earth through their heavenly intercession. Saint Thérèse hoped to make a difference after death, and Saint Dominic shared the same thought with his brothers on his deathbed:

I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth. (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux)

Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life. (Saint Dominic)

because you feel drawn to the saint for some reason. Get to know a saint well by reading about him or her, especially one who particularly inspires you. ✚

24 Mary: Perfect Model of Holiness

Marie, Mariam, Maureen, Moira, Mariah, Molly, Maria, Moya, Maryam, Maura, Mary. Do you have any friends with these names? Ask them if they know why their parents chose their name. Parents have named their children after the Virgin Mary for centuries, one way of honoring her special role in the Church. Perhaps this is true for your friends.

Mary's Holiness and Role in the Church

The Church honors Mary above all other saints. Mary is the holiest human being who ever lived. She was perfectly holy. We strive to become like her and ask her help in becoming

A Patron Saint for Teens

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga was born to a wealthy Italian family in the late 1500s. Inspired by the lives of the saints and his love of prayer, Aloysius gave up a life of luxury and comfort to join the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. While Aloysius was studying in Rome, a great plague broke out. He went out into the streets, on a regular basis, to care for the plague victims, soon catching the disease himself. He died at the age of twenty-three.



holier. The destiny of the Church is to be “holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Mary has already reached that perfection. Mary’s life is therefore a model toward which all members of the Church strive.

To consider Mary is to appreciate that she is the masterpiece of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Mary was born completely free of Original Sin and remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.

The Holy Spirit used and uses Mary to bring people into communion with Christ. Grace alone, through Jesus, saves us. God willed that a human should take a real and active role in working out the divine plan. He chose Mary from among the descendants of Eve to be the Mother of Jesus. The Holy Spirit worked in Mary’s life to prepare for the coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit’s divine intervention, the Father gives the world Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Notice the scene on the far left of the picture. What is the connection between the Annunciation and the Fall?

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fiat

Latin for "let it be done."

Theotokos

A Greek title for Mary meaning "God bearer."

Mary's Yes

The Virgin Mary modeled the perfect response to God by saying "Yes" to him. When the angel Gabriel announced that Mary, though still a virgin, would give birth to Jesus, she cooperated freely and fully with the Father's plan, saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Mary, by her **fiat**, by her acceptance of Gabriel's message, by her "yes," was cooperating in a real way in the Father's plan of salvation through Jesus.

Mary Is Theotokos

The word **Theotokos** means "God-bearer" in Greek. The Church uses this term for Mary because she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God who became man and who is himself God. In order for Mary to have such an important role, some preparation was needed.

The Holy Spirit prepared Mary to be the Mother of God. In order to carry the Son of God within and then mother him, she needed to be sinless and humble, full of grace. She was thus prepared in her mother's womb to be the holy Mother of God. She was free of Original Sin and was redeemed at the moment of her conception. She is the first and best fruit of Jesus' coming to redeem us.

It was through Mary that the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in Christ and the Church first began to be seen. She showed



What does this image convey about Mary's relationship with Jesus?

others the Father's Son for the first time. The Son of God was revealed first to humble people and Gentiles and they were the first to accept him.

Mary said "yes" throughout her life, notably as she stood by her son, sharing in his suffering on the cross. When Mary's earthly life was over, she was taken up, body and soul, into Heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son's Resurrection. We call this wonder the **Assumption of Mary**. The Lord glorified his mother by making her Queen over all things.

In her lifelong obedience and openness to the Father's will, through her Son's work of salvation, and according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Mary is the Church's model of faith and love and the first to collaborate with Christ in his mission. Mary foreshadows the destiny of all the members of the Body of Christ—we all hope to be resurrected on the last day, perfected through God's grace, and accepted into the heavenly Jerusalem, where there is no sadness or death.



Assumption of Mary

The dogma that recognizes that the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken directly to Heaven after her life on earth had ended.

Mary, Holy Mother of the Church and Intercessor

Because of her unique, active role in the Father's plan of salvation through his Son, Mary can be called our mother in the order of grace. Mary is thus the Mother of the Church because she actively participates in the divine plan of giving birth to believers.

Mary and Eve

The Church draws a parallel between Mary and Eve by calling Mary the New Eve. Just as Eve's disobedience signals humanity's fall into sin, Mary's obedience and cooperation with God's will reveals humanity's release from sin. Saint Irenaeus wrote, "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith." Saint Jerome taught, "Death through Eve; life through Mary." Through her obedience Mary "became the new Eve, mother of the living" (CCC, 511).

We know we can pray for Mary's intercession. After Jesus' Ascension, she prayed with his other followers for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through her intercession we receive gifts that help us to move spiritually toward eternal salvation. Because of this assistance, she is called Advocate, Helper, and Benefactress. ✚

Review

1. How is the Church both visible and invisible?
2. How is the Church holy when its members are sinful?
3. How is our holiness the result of God's grace?
4. What is sanctifying grace?
5. Explain the Communion of Saints as the communion of holy things.
6. Explain the Communion of Saints as the communion of holy people.
7. How do the saints model holiness for us?
8. How do the saints intercede for us?
9. Why is Mary a perfect model of holiness for other Church members?
10. What is the Assumption of Mary?