

CHRISTIANS IN DIALOGUE

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

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The Communion of Saints

EVALUATION FORM

The group leader invites the participants to complete the Evaluation Form at the end of the fourth study.

1. What did you appreciate about these studies?

2. What aspects of these studies did you find difficult?

3. What was the greatest challenge for you and your Church?

4. What topics would you like *Christians in Dialogue* to cover in future?

The Planning Committee invites the leader to respond to the two questions below.

1. Name of your group, each Church represented, and the number of people present from each denomination.

2. Generally speaking, how fully did participants enter into the discussion?

Thank you for your response.

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LEADER'S GUIDE

1. Gathering

People coming to a group for the first time will often have some anxiety –

- ◆ Will I know anyone?
- ◆ What will be expected of me?
- ◆ Did I switch off the oven?
- ◆ It is important to help them through this first awkward stage. Have all your preparations done well beforehand so that you are able to greet each person warmly on arrival, introducing them to one another, and perhaps having tea and coffee available.

2. Beginning

- A. When all have arrived get the session started by giving them a clear statement of what the group is about - Welcome the group
- ◆ who we are;
 - ◆ why we're here;
 - ◆ when we will finish.

It might go like this: "Welcome to my place, and I'm delighted that each of you has been able to make it. We are a group of people from Churches gathered together to reflect and share our ideas on ... (*name of study*). Tonight we will be looking at Study One

- B. Then invite the members to introduce themselves saying:
- ◆ who I am;
 - ◆ why I'm here;
 - ◆ what I hope to get out of the program.

Lead yourself by giving a short response to each of the three areas. Then invite each of the others to do likewise. Don't worry if some respond to only one or two of the areas.

- C. Then distribute copies of the program.

Encourage participants to listen to one another's ideas with respect.

3. Opening Devotion

- A. You may wish to play some music quietly in the background and give the group a few moments to reflect on the opening devotion. Then call for volunteers to lead it.
- B. You might like to choose an appropriate song for the group to share

4. Reflection on the Topic

Invite a couple of people to read the teaching. Encourage the readers to pause between each section.

5. Discussion

Allow a few minutes of quiet time to reflect on the questions. Encourage participants to share responses to each question but there is to be no pressure put on anyone to speak. Be sure to make some response to each speaker if only to say e.g. "Thank you John". This makes sure the participant feels that he / she has been heard.

6. Closure

Thank the participants for their participation. Check to ensure venue is right for next session.

Closing Devotion

Cuppa

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THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Study 1: Remembering the Saints

OPENING DEVOTION

(Take some time to prepare the environment and to become centred)

Leader: Let us pray

Faithful God, the light of your revelation brought Paul the gift of faith in Jesus your Son. Through the example of Jesus may we always give thanks for your life given to us and for having been enriched by him in all knowledge and love.

Reader: Adapted from St Paul's first letter to the Cor 12: 12-30.

Leader: Christ is like a single body which has many parts.

All: It is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts.

Leader: Therefore the foot cannot say:

All: I am not a part of the body.

Leader: Nor can the ear say:

All: I am not a part of the body.

Leader: The eye cannot say to the hand:

All: I don't need you.

Leader: Nor can the heart say to the feet.

All: I don't need you.

Leader: If one part of the body suffers,

All: All other parts suffer.

Leader: If one part of the body is praised

All: All other parts of the body share its happiness.

Leader: All of you are Christ's body

All: Each one of us is a part of it.

Prayer of Confession

Leader: Lord, Jesus Christ, we are your body, not because we have chosen that name but because you have given it to us. While we marvel at this great privilege, we also regret our failures.

All: Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us.

Leader: If through false pride or selfish independence we have said "I am not apart of the body."

All: Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us.

Leader: If through superiority or lack of love we have said "I don't need you."

All: Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us.

Leader: If we have known that other parts of your body suffer and have refused to share their pain.

All: Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us.

Leader: If we have seen other parts of your body rejoice and have suspected or scorned their happiness.

All: Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us.

Leader: If in place of you, the head of the body, we have served our own theology, tradition or prejudice and loved only those who belonged to us.

All: Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy.

Leader: Let the body of Christ join hands and pray silently.

Leader: Let us pray together The Lord's Prayer.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

To get us thinking:

In what ways has your own life or the life of your community been influenced or inspired by memories of a loved one or by the life of a particular saint. Share together about this.

Remembrance and our identity as a community

Our own personal self-consciousness is bound up with our memory. We remember the events of our own past and this determines to a large degree who we are today. This applies to communities as well as individuals. Our consciousness of ourselves as Australians is bound up with certain key event sin our past. For example, Anzac Day is more than a day of national remembrance of those who have suffered through war. The events celebrated then have entered into the making of our selfhood.

Similarly, for Israel, the Exodus from Egypt is remembered as an event which set the pattern for the life of the people for all time. For the Church, the remembrance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is central to our definition of ourselves as a faith community. In a lesser, yet still very significant degree, our memories of the story of the Church throughout its history are also part of our self-consciousness. The commemoration of great ones of the past helps to make us conscious of who we are as the Church community today. As Christians we do not remember the saints or the faithful departed in a vacuum, but rather in the context of thanksgiving to God for their lives.

Remembering the departed ones with Thanksgiving.

On a more personal level, when we have lost a loved one, remembering the loved one with thanksgiving to God is a basic part of the grieving process, helping us to redefine who we are in relation to the loved one who is no longer with us. Such prayers are usually part of the funeral service, and all our churches use such prayers from time to time in worship.

Here is a typical general example:

In you, Father, we are one family in earth and heaven.
We remember in your presence those who have died,
giving thanks especially for those

who have revealed to us your grace in Christ.
Help us to follow the example of your saints in light
and bring us with them
to the fullness of your eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord
(**Uniting in Worship** Leaders Book, p.641)

Such prayers include some of the following aspects:

1. A reminder of the fact that the Church is one family, and it includes those who have gone before (the great saints as well as ordinary believers).
2. Thanks to God for elements in the lives commemorated, with special gratitude for the ways in which the grace of God was evident in those lives.
3. A sense of belonging to the one community of the Church and in some way still preserving a relationship with those who are no longer alive on this earth.
4. A mention of the good example set by those who have gone before, and a desire to follow it.
5. A mention of the eternal glory which awaits us all in God's kingdom.
6. Where the person commemorated is a loved one or family member, there may be a prayer that God will forgive us for past failures on our part in our relationship with the person.

Most Christian people include these thoughts in their prayers in relation to the saints. Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches also include prayers for the departed, and this is the practice in some Lutheran churches as well. Generally in the Uniting Church and a number of other reformed or evangelical churches, prayers for the dead are not included, on the grounds that the departed are in the care of God now, and it would be impossible to desire a greater blessedness for them. Likewise the veneration of saints or the invocation of saints as practised in many churches, is avoided by some

Christian people. In spite of these very real differences, the thankful remembrance of the saints or the dear departed constitutes a sphere of common ground between the various churches. It is open to all of us to be inspired by the memory of something done by a saint.

Inspired by the memory of a Saint

While he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment or nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head

But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way?”

For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denari⁴ and the money given to the poor “. And they scolded her.

But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me.

For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.

She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.

Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her”

(Mark 14:3-9 NRSV)

The memory of what this nameless woman did (whether she was Mary of Bethany or another is not known) inspired the way in which Malcolm Muggeridge told the story of Mother Theresa in his book “Something Beautiful for God” and has inspired many another Christian to seek extravagant expression of love for Christ in the world.

Questions for Discussion

1. What kind of ordered pattern, if any, does your Church have for the commemoration of particular saints?
2. In what ways has the commemoration of saints played a real part in the formation of your own life as a Christian life?
3. Are you happy with your own Church’s attitude and practice towards the saints? How could things be better? What can you learn from the positions taken in other Churches?

CLOSING DEVOTION

(Take time to prepare the environment and to become centred.)

Leader: Let us pray for the Church throughout the world and for the tradition to which we belong, that the things it should no longer cling to may be left behind; that the love of self preservation may be set aside; that the deaths you demand of it may be embraced joyfully; and that in the end, it may be the means by which we might discover.

All: CHRIST HAS DIED, CHRIST IS RISEN, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN.

Leader: Now in silence we give ourselves and all that we count important to your will and purpose.

(Silence)

We cannot expect the Church to be sacrificial if we will not be. Nor can we expect to gather the Kingdom's harvest if we do not sow the Kingdom's seed. So in us and through us, may your Spirit proclaim,

All: CHRIST HAS DIED, CHRIST IS RISEN, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN.

Leader: We offer our prayer and ourselves to you in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

Blessing: May God who supplies seed to sow and bread to eat, supply us with all we need to produce a rich harvest.

All: May God bless all our work and worship done in Christ's name today and every day. Amen.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Study 2: Imitating the Saints

OPENING DEVOTION - ST PATRICK

St Patrick was born in Great Britain in 385. As a youth he was taken captive as a slave and worked as a herdsman. During this time he developed a growing relationship with God and became a man of intense prayer. After six years he escaped and boarded a ship to the Continent. Later he was called, in a dream, to return to Ireland and preach Jesus Christ there. St Patrick had a very deep appreciation and faith in the saving power of God and His abiding presence. The hymn called the Breastplate is attributed to him. The last verse of this prayer is a well known hymn to most of us.

Introduction and Welcome

Song

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me
Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all who love me, Christ in mouth of Mend and stranger. (Pause)

Leader: For the times we have forgotten that you are with us always. Lord have mercy.

All: Lord have mercy.

Leader: For the times we have failed to allow you to comfort and restore us. Christ have mercy.

All: Christ have mercy.

Leader: For the times we have not recognised you in the stranger. Lord have mercy.

All: Lord have mercy.

Leader: Let us take a few moments to remember Christ's words reminding us that He is with us always.

Reader 1: "And know that I am with you always, even to the end of time."
(Matt 28:20)

Reader 2: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; stop being anxious and watchful, for I am your God. I bring you strength, I bring you help. I uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Is 41:10 ff)

Reader 3: "On that day you will understand that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you." (John 14:20)

Reader 4: "Those who trust in Yahweh are like Mt Zion; unshakeable, standing for ever. Jerusalem! Encircled by mountains as Yahweh encircles his people now and forever." (Ps 125:2) (Pause for silent praise)

Leader: Let us give glory and praise to God for being with us always.

All: To you glory and praise forever.

Leader: For your indwelling presence
All: To you glory and praise forever.
Leader: For the gift of inner strength and wisdom
All: To you glory and praise forever.

Spontaneous Prayers (You may have some special intention you wish to pray for)

Leader: Let us pray
All: Lord we give praise and thanks to you for making your home in us. May we daily become more aware of you and recognise you in the lives of others. We make this year through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Leader: Listen, Jesus has promised to be with us always.
All: Amen, we go to meet him.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised” (Hebrews 6:12).

St Paul wrote, “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me (1 Corinthians 4:15-16)

.Most Christians have found, in the lives of fellow-believers, inspiration and encouragement for their own discipleship.

Bishop Michael Putney writes:

“We imitate the saints because we realise that they have been transformed by God precisely to offer us examples of how to be disciples of Christ in our time and our situation. Not all saints have relevance to our situation. Some are examples for a particular age or culture. That is one of the reasons why the calendar of the saints needs to be pruned. Many of those remaining in the general calendar are there because their model of discipleship still has relevance for the Church of this age and in many places. However this role is only well sewed when we move beyond the too succinct ‘she was renowned for her penitential life’ to a more robust account of the real life of the saint. Then we can see how he or she actually dealt with issues like those confronting us today.” (Michael Putney, “Mary and the Saints” Liturgy News, June 1993.)

Elsewhere Bishop Putney writes:

“Karl Rahner S.J. described saints as charismatics, men and women especially gifted by the Holy Spirit to become initiators and creative models of the kind of holiness which was right for their age and which enabled them to fulfil one of the specific tasks confronting the church in that age.... They are the heroes and heroines of our tradition. Along with Mary the mother of Jesus, they offer us a living version of the gospel, a life we can imitate as we endeavour to be faithful disciples of Jesus in the way that is appropriate for our century. For example St Maximilian Kolb has shown us that the grace of God can conquer even the devastating, all-conquering destructive force of evil that was focused in Auschwitz and which seems typical of our age. Even in that environment, we now know a man can still believe, can still hope and above all, can still love his neighbour through the grace of God. Perhaps in giving his life for the young married man sentenced to death in the starvation chamber, he also modelled for

modern celibate men and women the availability for 'martyrdom' which is at the heart of the celibate call." (Michael Putney, "Saints for Sinners" The Review, November 1987)

Dr John Strelan highlights this aspect of the 'down to earth' humanity of the saints when he writes:

"The conviction that the lives of the saints are an encouragement and consolation to Christians is not based on the 'successes' of God's people, but on the very opposite, on the weaknesses and shortcomings of the saints, who were saved by God's grace through faith, just as we. The saints are paradigms, models of justifying faith. Through the example of God's gracious dealings with the saints we know that God bears with our weaknesses, and graciously forgives those who cling to his promises. The very humanity of the saints, the fact that they are not heavenly but earthly (even earthy) people, the 'warts and all' portraits we have of them - all this encourages us to believe in the God who indeed 'justifies the ungodly. (Rom. 4:5)' (John Strelan, "Mary MacKillop and 'The Service of the Saints', Lutheran Theological Journal, August 1995.)

Han Spykerboer writes on the topic: "The Saints: What do they mean for us? - A Uniting Church perspective"

"The Uniting Church does not recognise individual Saints and it is not likely ever to do that. But IF the Uniting Church were going to have a real personal Saint, then it would be a saint who would meet the various contrasting elements present within the Uniting Church. It would be a Saint with a strong evangelical fervour, a Saint whose prophetic and non-conformist ways would bring this Saint in conflict with the church and its leaders, it would be a Saint with vision and courage, it would be a Saint like Mary MacKillop."

John Macquarie (Principles of Christian Theology), an Anglican, writes about "The Communion of Saints":

"The saints in general stand to the Church in the same kind of twofold relation as we saw in the case of Mary - they have a priority within the Church, as those who have attained and who are therefore called the "Church triumphant"; yet they have also an affinity with the whole Church, in so far as *the characteristics which they manifest should be seen to be emerging in the whole body of Christians.*

Once again, the central characteristic held up before us is self-giving love. This is what is most typical of sainthood, however diverse its manifestations.

In the Anglican Prayer Book for Australia, there are prayers for use at the celebration of the feast of a saint. One example is:

"Faithful God, you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses: grant that we, encouraged by the example of your servant may persevere in running the race that is set before us, until at last with him/her we may attain to your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."

Presented above are some approaches to the Christian practice of imitating the saints. Reflect on these as you explore the discussion questions below.

Questions for Discussion

1. Name any of the saints, ancient or modern, whom you have been encouraged to imitate, and describe the influence they have had on you.

2. The Bible verses quoted at the beginning of this topic urge us to imitate the faith and life of other believers. How do you relate this to verses like I Peter 2:21: “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps “; Philippians 2:5: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus “; John 13:34: (Jesus said to his disciples) “As I have loved you, so you must love one another”? What is the relationship between the example of other believers and the example of Christ?

3. How do you respond to the idea that saints are ‘warts and all’ people whose example consists not in their achievements but in what the grace of God achieved in and through them, in spite of their sinfulness? Think of some examples.

4. What would you like other Christians to imitate about your faith and life? Have other Christians ever told you that you have been an example and inspiration to them in their lives? What did they say? How did you respond?

CLOSING DEVOTION

(Create an atmosphere by lighting a candle and playing gentle soft music)

Reader 1: “Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine. Should you pass through the sea, I will be with you.” (Is 43:2)

Reader 2: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart: I appointed you as a prophet.... You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you.” (Jer 1:5)

Leader: Let us take a moment to discover Christ behind us - in our past. Look over the day and identify any encounter you had with people or nature.

If you have anything at all you feel ashamed of, ask Jesus to forgive you. If you are feeling pain from any happening, talk to Jesus about it.

If you are at peace with the day, give praise and thanks to Jesus. If you had a satisfying day, give praise and thanks.

(You may wish to pray aloud or in your heart silently)

Leader: Let us become aware of Jesus going before us - “to the waters of repose He leads me.”(Ps 23:2) Maybe we have no idea what lies ahead but let us place our hand in the hand of God and ask for the gift of trust.

(Pause for quiet or spontaneous prayer.)

All: We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the arm of God be around you, the way of Christ be your guide and may you be aware of the Spirit with you at all times.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Study 3: Venerating the Saints

OPENING DEVOTION - ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant draper, and as a youth led a frivolous, carefree life with other young people. Experience of sickness and civil warfare steadied him. One day in the church of San Damiano he seemed to hear an image of Christ say to him: "Francis repair my falling house". He, characteristically, took the words literally, selling a bale of goods taken from his father's warehouse to pay for the repairs. His father disinherited and disowned him. Francis went away penniless. He was a man of tremendous spiritual insight and power, whose consuming love for Jesus Christ motivated him to practise renunciation of worldly possessions and devote his life to simplicity, directness and singleness.

In 1224, while praying, there appeared on St Francis' body scars corresponding to the five wounds of the crucified Christ. They never left him and were one of the sources of physical pain and weakness he suffered increasingly until he welcomed "Sister Death" two years later.

During the past 100 years, admiration of St Francis has been widespread and spontaneous among all Christians of all communions and among other faith traditions. His belief in redeemed Creation found expression in the "Canticle of the Sun".

Song: All Creatures of our God and King Verses 1, 2 & 4.

Leader: Let us Pray.

All: God you helped Francis to reflect the image of Christ through a life of simplicity, humility and renunciation of worldly possessions. May your love for us encourage us to take this Gospel message to heart and live our lives accordingly. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: Creator God you have entrusted the world to our care. For the times we have neglected your creation. Lord have mercy.

All: Lord have mercy.

Leader: Jesus Saviour you have called us to live the Gospel in word and deed. For the times we have rejected this challenge. Christ have mercy.

All: Christ have mercy.

Leader: Spirit of the living God you nourish us with life and strength. For the times we have been unaware of these gifts. Lord have mercy.

All: Lord have mercy.

Leader: Let us listen with open hearts and minds to the word of God.

Reader 1: Jesus exclaimed: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children." (Matt 11:25)

Reader 2: "Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourself purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Lukel2:33-34)

Reader 3: “No one can be the slave of two masters: He will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and money.” (Matt 6:24)

Reader 4: “I implore you by God’s mercy to offer yourselves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart.” (Rom 12:1)

(Pause for silent prayer)

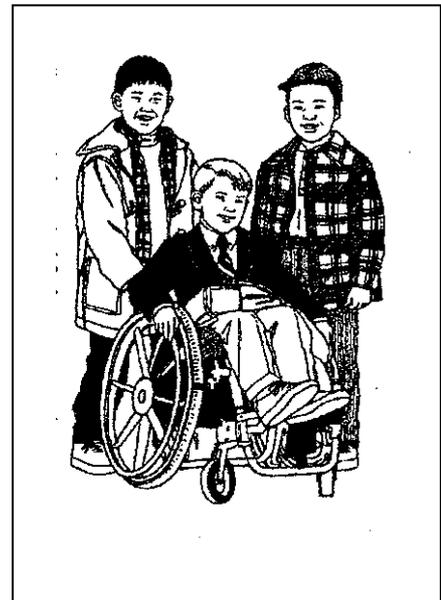
Leader: I now invite you to pray aloud for yourself, others and the world. Let us bring all our petitions to the Lord by praying together the Our Father.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

To venerate is to regard with reverence; i.e. to have deep respect for,... tinged with awe.

In the history of Christianity, there have been many saints whose lives of dedication to God and God’s people strike a chord of reverence and awe in the hearts of Christians today. So many of the saints have given their lives in martyrdom or in constant devotion to God. Some traditions remember and venerate their saints by allocating days in the calendar when those worshipping can pay their respect to a particular saint on a specific day (or feast).

Others remember differently. It fulfils a human need to acknowledge those who can model paths of perfection in the Christian journey. Their passion in serving God, their life values and the love with which they lived their lives are wholesome examples of the power of God’s grace and friendship. As Christians celebrate the feast of a saint, they give glory to God who has done such a wonderful thing in the life of one of us, and we recognise that God can do similar extraordinary things in our lives if we would let it happen.



In the Anglican Prayer Book for Australia, one of the prayers on those days is:

O God

by whose grace your servant
became a burning and a shining light in your Church:
grant that we also may be aflame
with the spirit of love and discipleship,
and walk before you as children of light;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

The writer of Hebrews 12:23 refers to the spirits of the righteous made perfect who are in company with the angels and with the risen Christ.

Nowhere in scripture or tradition is there a hint of there being an equality of saints and God, but only a certainty that saints and angels are with God. By our venerating the saints,

Christians are actually acknowledging the power of God's grace. As Christians we are rejoicing that God's love can be manifested in human form.

"We venerate them because we see in them not incredible examples of humanity but incredible examples of human beings transformed by the grace of God given to us in Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit." [Michael Putney, "Mary and the Saints", Liturgy News, June 1993, p11]

Questions for discussion

1. "... within the Roman Catholic tradition of the past, the veneration of the saints has sometimes appeared to be more important than the worship of God. However, with the renewal of the liturgy and its emphasis on the redeeming power of Christ, there is little danger of this. In fact, a task for the Catholic tradition is to find a new and appropriate way of remembering the saints." [Barbara Reynolds-Hutchinson]
 - (a) Discuss some of the past misunderstandings, bringing the freshness of today's knowledge to heal the old wounds.
 - (b) What do you think are some appropriate ways of remembering saints today?
2. "Memorials ...have the potential to draw us into the mystery of the communion of saints in its fullest sense." [Michael Putney] How?
3. Some churches venerate only those apostles and disciples who can be found in Scripture, while others include saints from other cultures and traditions. Which saints do you venerate in your congregational worship?
4. In the light of your discussion, how do you interpret the words from Luke 1:48? How does Mary lead us to the centrality of Christ in our Christian faith?
5. In Orthodox Christianity, the holiness of God is seen to invade the created world in both persons and things, so icons are venerated as both symbols of the saints and symbols of God's sacramental world. When a person is seen to kiss a cross or icon, it can be judged by a stranger to his/her tradition as idolatry. Can you apply the fruits of your discussions to accept the action as actually leading to the holiness of God?

CLOSING DEVOTION

(Create an atmosphere by lighting a candle and playing soft music.)

Leader: Let us pause for a moment to bring to mind our Creator God.

Right side: In the beginning, God made the world: made it and mothered it, shaped it and fathered it

Left side: Filled it with seeds and signs of fertility. Filled it with love and its folk with ability.

Right Side: All that is green, blue, deep and growing

Left Side: God's hand created you.

Right Side: All that is tender, firm, fragrant and curious

Left Side: God's hand created you.

Right Side: All that crawls, flies, swims, walks and is motionless

Left Side: God's hand created you.

Right Side: All that speaks, sings, cries, laughs or keeps silent

Left Side: God's hand created you.

Right Side: All that suffers, lacks, limps or longs for an end

Left Side: God's hand created you.

Right Side: The world belongs to the Lord

All: The earth and all its people are his.

(Pause for silent prayer)

Song: All Creatures of our God and King Verses 1, 5 & 7

Reader: "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and woodworms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor wood worms destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:19-21)

Leader: We praise you for the example and encouragement of your saints; for their witness to the truth of your gospel; for the hope of glory which we share with them in Jesus Christ our Lord.

(A Prayer Book for Australia p112.)

Leader: For all that God can do within us. For all that God can do without us.

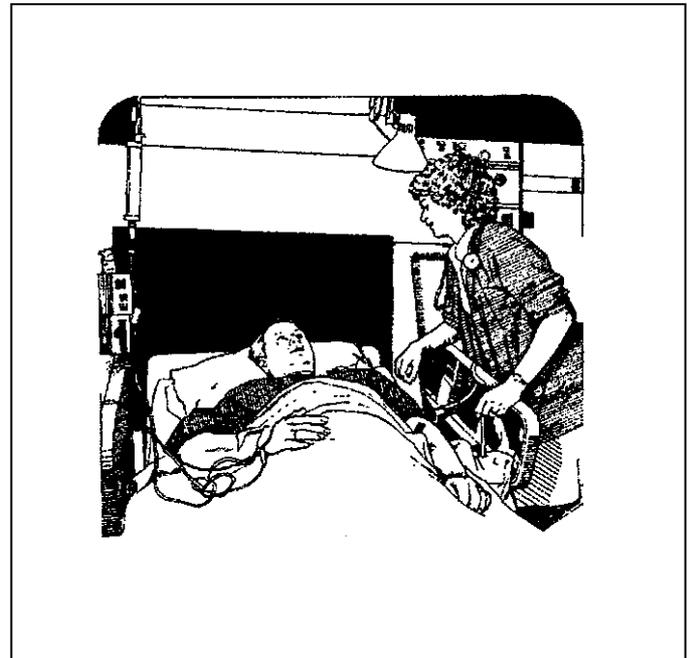
All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: For all in whom Christ lived before us. For all in whom Christ lives beside us.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: For all the Spirit wants to bring us. For where the Spirit wants to send us.

All: Thanks be to God



CHRISTIANS IN DIALOGUE

Study 4: Invoking the Saints

OPENING DEVOTION - MARY MACKILLOP

Mary Mackillop was born in Melbourne in 1842 and died in Sydney on 8 August 1909. Responding to the isolation of colonial families, she pioneered a new form of Religious life to provide education for their children. She and her sisters shared the life of the poor and the itinerant, offering special care to destitute women and children. She is remembered for her eagerness to discover God's will in all things, for her charity in the face of malicious slander, and for her abiding trust in God's providence.

Opening Prayer

Leader: In your loving providence, O God, you raised up Mary Mackillop as a blessing for those in need. May her tireless dedication to the poor inspire in us fresh energies for all the works of love. We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Reader 1: A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians 3:12-14.

“As the chosen of God, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Let the Word of Christ in all its richness find a home in you. Teach each other and advise each other in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God; and whatever you say or do, let it be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, in thanksgiving to God the Father through him.”

(Pause for silent prayer)

Leader: Most holy loving God, your Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, was the source and inspiration of Mary Mackillop's life. In gratitude we pray:

All: We praise you, we bless you, we glorify you.

Leader: With great trust in your Providence, Mary MacKillop was open and ready to meet the needs of her time;

All: Grant that we may meet the challenges of today's world with faith and courage.

Leader: Mary suffered misunderstanding, malicious slander and wrongful excommunication with peace and humility;

All: May we also bear with peace and humility any difficulties we meet in your service.

Leader: Mary had a deep love of your will and readiness to embrace the cross;

All: Grant us the courage to follow her in accepting all that is painful in our lives.

Leader: Mary Mackillop spent her life caring for the poor and destitute and educating the children of the poor;

All: Grant that we may bring love and compassion to all whom we serve.

(Spontaneous petitions)

Leader: Let us pray.

God of compassion, you called Mary Mackillop to be the foundress of a religious congregation committed to the education of poor children and to the service of those in need. We thank you for all who have followed in her footsteps and for the love and concern shown through them to others. We ask you to bless them and those they serve in the name of Jesus who is our Way, our Truth and our Life. Amen.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

Introduction: What do you understand by “Invoking the Saints”? Share if you so desire.

From an Anglican Perspective

By the term communion in this article of the Creed, we are to understand “fellowship”. This fellowship of saints is grounded on the truth that all saints, living and departed, are united to Jesus Christ, and form his mystical body. The saints are members one of another, because they are members of Christ’s body, the Holy Catholic Church. “So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” (Rom 12.5)

The term saints, or “holy ones”, is applied in the New Testament to all the baptised living upon earth, who have not forfeited baptismal grace. The baptised are saints in the sense that they have been sanctified by baptism, and are called to lead a holy life.

But in later use, and according to modern custom, the term “saints” is applied to the more distinguished members of the Church, as especially to such as have departed this life, and are now with Christ. The Church has thus specially honoured the blessed Virgin, the apostles, and the martyrs, and other great leaders in the army of the faithful. Such are described in the collect for All Saints’ day as the “blessed saints”. This same communion also embraces the less prominent servants of Christ, who have departed this life in his faith and fear. The article of the Creed teaches that we are in close relations to all these holy ones beyond the grave, that they remember us before God and pray for us.

The term “saints” is also applied in the Old Testament to the holy angels (Deut 33.2) the first family of God, who minister to all below who are in Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews (12.22) speaks of “an innumerable company of angels”, to whom the redeemed race of mankind “are come”, and who will hereafter be gathered into a closer union with us in Christ.

Thus communion of saints embraces the whole family God - the glorified saints, the holy angels, the faithful departed, and the faithful still on earth.

“It is quite right to pray for the departed, if we have a good hope that they died in God’s favour; and where no such hope exists, we may surely commend them to his mercy.” The Jews regularly used such prayers in their public services and our Lord, who attended those services, must often have joined in them. He in no way rebuked the practice: In St Paul’s words - “the Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day”, we have probably an example of prayer for the departed.

The Church of England, in Article XXII condemns “the Romish doctrine concerning invocation of saints, that is to say, that system of prayer to the saints which led to their being

regarded otherwise than as exalted suppliants. Before the Reformation serious abuses had arisen. It was supposed, for instance, that the saints had power with God because of their own merits, and that they were kinder, and had greater sympathy for sinners than Christ our Saviour. . . .the exclusive request of their intercessions is likely, at once to constitute them intercessors in a way different from God's servants on earth, and to interfere with the office of the Greater Intercessor".

Vernon Staley - The Catholic Religion - A Manual of instruction for members of the Anglican Communion 1839 - 29th Edition 1961

What insights have you achieved from this reading? What questions has this reading raised?

From a Lutheran Perspective

Saints are to be remembered, venerated, imitated. But they are not to be invoked or prayed to. This is the decisive point of Article 21 of the Augsburg Confession. The invocation of saints is seen as a direct attack on Christ. The Scripture passages which are cited (1 John 2:1; 1 Tim 2:5; Rom 8:24) underscore the truth that the only invocation which has God's promise attached to it is our invocation of Christ.

What is at stake here is not only the diminution of Christ's honour but also the distortion of God's relation to us in Christ. Melanchthon explains in his defence of Article 21 that those who rely on their invocation to saints "suppose that Christ is more severe and the saints more approachable... Thus they actually make them mediators of redemption". Melanchthon continues:

Two qualifications must be present if one is to be a propitiator. In the first place, there must be a Word of God to assure us that God is willing to have mercy and to answer those who call upon him through this propitiator. For Christ there is such a promise.. .But for the saints there is no such promise.

Finally, perhaps one may suggest that as Australian Catholics rejoice in the beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop, they keep in mind the reminder of Article 21, that no veneration of any saint should in any way diminish Christ and his work; rather, proper veneration exalts Christ, magnifies him, gives glory to him and him alone.

In dealing with the question of "the service of the saints" the framers of the Augsburg Confession did not place the matter in the section which dealt with abuses; rather, they placed it in the section which confessed the fundamentals of the faith. At the time, the reformers believed that the cult of the saints was contrary to the gospel: it did not magnify Christ and his benefits.

Almost five hundred years later, in a country far distant from Europe, the beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop raises the old questions anew: **Is it in keeping with the gospel? Does it promote Christ? Let us pray that not only in theory but also in practice the answer to both questions is in the affirmative.** (*John G. Strelan - . Excerpt from Paper: Mary MacKillop and the Service of the Saints pp63-66*)

What is your understanding of the Lutheran beliefs about Saints? What is your response to this reading?

From a Uniting Perspective

Members of the Uniting Church are reminded of belief in "the communion of saints" every time they repeat the Apostles' Creed, not least when baptism is celebrated in a service of worship. They may also be aware of it, in a strongly personal way, during those prayers in which thanks are offered for the lives and examples of "the faithful departed". But this is not

to say that consciousness of “the communion of saints” has bulked large, or does so even today, within the membership of the Uniting Church.

That there have been changes towards greater awareness is clear in the past few decades. Liturgical and theological renewal have led not a few to appreciate the significance of these articles of belief and devotion for any comprehensive appreciation of the Christian faith. So Uniting Church members today may well agree with fellow Christians that they hold in common the understanding that the fellowship (or communion) they have with all Christians (or the “saints”) extends not only around this planet, but across the centuries.

Agreement is to be found also that in the New Testament all who are part of the body of Christ (the church) are to be reckoned as “holy” or “saints”. They are so not because of personal worth, but because they belong to God and are clothed in his holiness. Among such, through their shared living “in Christ”, there is fellowship or communion. Uniting Church usage is also comfortable with the application of the specific title of “Saint” to key figures within the New Testament record, and uses such in the naming of some of its church buildings and hospitals. This is not to say that such “Saints” are seen as perfect, or examples in everything they said or did, but that the grace of God worked in them in peculiarly significant ways.

However, important differences of understanding remain. Whatever the apparent inconsistency involved, protestants consciously do not apply the title “Saint” to post-biblical figures, and notably not to significant figures in their own history like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley or to take an Australian example, John Flynn. Nor is it their belief that the “saints” of previous times may be invoked to intercede for us in the here and now, not even the mother of our Lord. Rather all such “saints” are remembered with gratitude for their lives and examples, which may well inspire us in our living and give us instances of that great cloud of witnesses referred to in Hebrews 12:1. With Hebrews 12:2 the focus throughout would be on their and our great pioneer, their inspiration and model, or he is to be ours. It is Christ who prays for us, as in Romans 8:34.

Through all of this we feel keenly a sense of fellowship and continuity with all of God’s people, and God’s faithfulness to them encourages us in our dependence upon God’s faithfulness to us.

It may well be that dialogue will lead to fuller appreciation of the communion of saints within the Uniting Church. It may also lead others to review their own attitudes as common ground is sought. At very least we should be able to join together, without reservation in that 19th century hymn which includes in verses 1 and 4 the following:

For all the saints who from their labours rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed
Hallelujah!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine
yet all are one in three, for all are thine,
Hallelujah!

W.W. How (#384) Ian Callinan Nov.1996

Rev I. Gillman

What stands out for you in this reading?



From a Roman Catholic Perspective

We all have heroes, heroines and role models, be they famous public figures, our friends and family we have known. It is a deep human need to say, "I admire that person because..."

These people fire our dreams and give us courage. The doctrine of the communion of saints, acknowledged in the Nicene Creed gives theological terminology to this deep human intuition.

The spiritual origin of the communion of saints is the recognition that all reality is interrelated and that this relationship does not end at death, rather, in the life of the resurrection, this relationship is strengthened. This means that not only do we remember the recognised "saints", but we acknowledge that those we love are still united with us even in death.

Admittedly, within the Roman Catholic tradition of the past, the veneration of the saints has sometimes appeared to be more important than the worship of God. However, with the renewal of the liturgy and its emphasis on the redeeming power of Christ, there is little danger of this. In fact, a task for the Catholic tradition is to find a new and appropriate way of remembering the saints.

By remembering the saints we encounter role models and signs of hope for ourselves as we live and mature in our Christian faith. They were ordinary people, like us, who lived wholeheartedly and courageously. When life decisions are hard or we are looking for direction, encouragement and inspiration we remember we have sisters and brothers through the centuries who have shared the same struggles and hopes and have responded to God's inspiration.

So we can imitate, not their life style, but the passionateness, the values and the wholehearted love with which they lived their lives. They are living examples of the power of God's grace and friendship.

To venerate, does not mean to make them equal to God, but to rejoice that God's love is made manifest in human form. We invoke their intercession which simply means we ask them to pray for us and with us - as we would any living friend. The idea of patron saints, (e.g. St Cecilia, patron of music, Mary MacKillop, the first Australian saint, gives us the sense that these people have achieved in a particular area,) will help us in our own endeavour to be good musicians, Australians and so on. By invoking their help, we remind ourselves that we live in this web of relationships with all reality and that in God we are sisters and brothers who support each other on our life journey.

The saints reveal both the mystery of redemption and the capacity of the human person to respond. This is evident in prayers such as the Angelus and the Rosary.

The Angelus is a scripturally based prayer grounded in the story of the Annunciation. Luke Ch 1 v26-28

- V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.
- R. And she conceived of the Holy Ghost. Hail Mary.
- V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.
- R. Be it done unto me according to Thy word. Hail Mary.
- V. And the Word was made flesh.
- R. And dwelt amongst us. Hail Mary.
- V. Pray for us O holy Mother of God

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

The Hail Mary is centred on key phrases from the story of the Visitation. Luke Ch 1: 39-42.

Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus.

Holy Mary mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The Rosary

The Rosary is a special kind of meditative prayer which helps lead us to Jesus by reflecting on his life. The Rosary with its fifteen decades focusses on the Incarnation, the suffering and the glorification. They form a kind of summary of the life of Jesus and Mary.

Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation Luke 1: 26ff: The Visitation Luke 1: 39ff: The Birth of Our Lord Luke 2:1ff: Presentation in the Temple Luke 2:22ff: Finding of the Child Jesus Luke 2 :41ff.

Sorrowful Mysteries

Agony in the Garden Matt 26:36: Scourging at the Pillar. Matt 27:27: Crowning with Thorns. Matt 27:29: Carrying of the Cross. Matt 27:32: The Crucifixion. Matt 27:32

Glorious Mysteries

The Resurrection Luke 24:1-2; The Ascension Acts 1:6-1 1: The Descent of the Holy Spirit Acts 2:1-4 The Assumption; The Presentation

These prayers are not about worshipping Mary, the mother of Jesus.. These prayers recall the great saving acts of God and the love of this woman to respond to them and thus enabled God's love for humankind to be manifest. A call we have all received.

Barbara Reynolds – Hutchinson

What new insights have you gained from reflecting on the Catholic perspective? How are their beliefs similar/different? What is the difference in the relationship between myself and other living Christians on the one hand, or the Saints and the Dead on the other hand?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Opening Prayer:

Holy God source of all goodness, you show us in Mary Mackillop a woman of faith who lived by the power of the Cross. Teach us to embrace what she pioneered; new ways of living the Gospel that respect and defend the human dignity of all in our land. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reader 1: “Out of your infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong.” (Eph 3 :16)

Reader 2: “If Yahweh set his heart on you and chose you, it was not because you outnumbered other peoples; you were the least of all peoples.”
(Deut 7: 7)

Reader 3: “I believe that nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Phil 3: 8)

Reader 4: A reading from a letter of Mary Mackillop to Monsignor Kirby.

“To me, the will of God is a dear book which I am never tired of reading, which has always some new charm for me. Nothing is too little to be noticed there, but yet my littleness and nothingness has often dared to oppose it, and I am painfully conscious that in many ways I still in my tepidity offend against it without perceiving what I am doing. But such lessons as you gave me the other evening then come to my aid and encourage me, for the love of my sweet Jesus is too strong, too beautiful, and His merits too great for me not to cling to Him.”

(Pause for reflection or spontaneous prayer)

Blessing

Leader: Through the example of Mary Mackillop, may you learn to recognise God’s will and trust in God’s providence.

All: Amen.