



LESSON THIRTEEN

The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints: Our Extended Family

Opening Prayer

God of all grace, you have called us to belong to Christ and to become part of your holy people. As we gather in your name, we thank you for the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, those who loved you, served you, and now rejoice in your presence.

Help us to walk the path of holiness, as they did, and to know that, in you, we are never alone.

May your Holy Spirit open our minds to the gift of the whole Church, in heaven and on earth. Form in us the same trusting “yes” that Mary gave so that we, too, may bear Christ to the world.

Amen.



Lesson Objectives:

- ❖ Understand what is meant by the Communion of Saints, the spiritual family of the Church in heaven and on earth, united in Christ.
- ❖ Recognize Mary's unique role in salvation history and in the Church as the Mother of God.
- ❖ Become familiar with the four key Marian dogmas.
- ❖ Learn why Catholics ask the saints to intercede for us, how this practice differs from worship, and begin to develop a personal devotion to Mary and the saints.
- ❖ See holiness as possible and desirable in our own lives.

BURNING QUESTIONS

❖ Since God sent us his only Son, Jesus, why do we need the saints?

In the Creed, we say we believe in the “communion of saints.” What role do you think the saints and Mary might play in our spiritual lives?

❖ Why is Mary so important in Catholicism? Wasn't she just a woman God chose to use in his plan?

For people unfamiliar with Catholic tradition, Mary can seem like a background figure. How do you understand her prominence in Catholic life and prayer?

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Feast Day: October 1

Lived: January 2, 1873 – September 30, 1897 · Alençon, France · Patron of Missionaries, Florists, Pilots

The youngest daughter of Sts. Louis and Zélie Martin, Thérèse entered the Carmelite monastery at fifteen and died of tuberculosis at twenty-four. Unable to do great things for God, she discovered the Little Way: “the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and absolute surrender” (*Story of a Soul*). Named a Doctor of the Church, she wrote in *Story of a Soul* that her vocation was to be love in the heart of the Church. Her intercession has been so powerful that the Church declared her patroness of missionaries, though she was never sent on mission.



“I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth.”

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

The Communion of Saints

One Body Across Time and Eternity

Baptism unites each person to the Body of Christ. That Body extends beyond the congregation assembled at Mass. The faithful on earth, still battling against evil, are the “Church Militant.” The souls in purgatory are called the “Church Suffering.” The saints in heaven are the “Church Triumphant.” We are all one communion; we are not separated from those who have died in Christ.

Why We Ask the Saints to Pray

We do not worship the saints; we ask them to intercede for us, just as we ask friends on earth to pray for us. Those in heaven are fully alive in God and can hear our petitions. Their prayers, united to Christ’s, are powerful (see Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4). It is the Church praying together.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.”

Hebrews 12:1



Mary: Mother of God and First Disciple

The Four Marian Dogmas

The Church's teaching on Mary is expressed in four dogmas: (1) *Theotokos*: Mary is the Mother of God, because the One she bore is truly God (Council of Ephesus, 431). (2) Perpetual Virginity: Mary remained a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus. (3) Immaculate Conception: Mary was preserved from Original Sin from the moment of her conception, by the anticipated merits of Christ. (4) Assumption: At the end of her life, Mary was taken body and soul into heavenly glory.

The First and Greatest Disciple

Mary holds an important place in the Catholic Church because of her role in God's plan of salvation. Where Eve's "no" to God introduced sin and death, Mary's "yes"—"let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38)—opened the door to salvation. The unique honor we give her is expressed in Scripture by her cousin Elizabeth at the visitation: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42).

"Henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Luke 1:48–49

The Ongoing Roles of Mary and the Saints

Our Mother and Intercessor

From the Cross, Jesus gave Mary to the beloved disciple—and to all disciples—as mother: “Behold, your mother” (John 19:27). The Church holds that Mary continues to intercede for her children. Her one desire, as at Cana, is to direct our attention to her son: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

Intercessors and Models

The saints show us that holiness in this life is an attainable goal and what it looks like in a particular human life. They are not all the same; they are farmers and philosophers, mothers and martyrs, scholars and mystics, which means each person can find in a companion who understands their own struggles and vocation. In heaven, their intercession is more powerful, and our veneration of them (*dulia*) does not replace the worship due to God alone (*latreia*).

“And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God.”

Revelation 8:4



13

**The Blessed Virgin Mary
and the Saints:
Our Help from Heaven**



Discussion Questions

- ❖ How would you explain to a non-Catholic friend the difference between asking saints to pray for us and praying directly to God? Can you think of any analogies in everyday life?
- ❖ How does this understanding of the Church as spanning heaven, earth, and purgatory challenge or enrich your understanding of Christian community?
- ❖ If you were to choose four or five saints for your personal “crew” or “posse,” which ones would you select and why?

Faith and Fun

In religious art, or icons, what does it usually mean when a saint is shown holding a lily?

a. Charity

b. Suffering

c. Purity

d. Martyrdom

Faith and Fun

In religious art, or icons, what does it usually mean when a saint is shown holding a lily?

a. Charity

b. Suffering

c. Purity ✓

d. Martyrdom

Lilies are symbols of purity and chastity. A lily is often seen in the hands of a saint like St. Joseph, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Catherine of Siena, reflecting their deep holiness and devotion to God.

Other identifying symbols in saintly iconography include palm branches, which indicate martyrdom (e.g., St. George, St. Lucy); a book, for saints who are writers (e.g., St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas); and a crucifix, indicating devotion to the Passion of Christ (e.g., St. Teresa of Ávila).

The Rosary

A Prayer of Memory and Meditation

The Rosary is sometimes misunderstood as an empty, repetitive prayer to Mary rather than to God. In fact, as we pray the Rosary, we meditate on the life of Christ—his joyful, luminous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries. The repetitive Hail Marys quiet the mind and create space to meditate on Jesus. Mary’s role is always to point toward her son.

Origins in Scripture and Tradition

The Our Father comes from Christ himself. The first words of the Hail Mary come from the angel Gabriel and from Elizabeth. The Glory Be is an early doxology of the Church. Mary’s one desire is to lead us deeper into the mystery of her son, which is exactly what the Rosary is designed to do.



Living It Out:

Create a prayer space in your home. Furnish it with a crucifix, an image of the Blessed Mother, or a favorite saint. Make the space inviting, and use it whenever you can.

Closing Prayer

Memorare:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.

To thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

Announcements / Reminders — add notes here