Communion of Saints

At the Easter Vigil Mass we renew our Baptismal vows. Part of this is professing a belief in the Communion of Saints.

I would dare to say that the Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints is as misunderstood by most Catholics as it is Protestants.

To be able to defend our faith we must have a good understanding of our beliefs.

As we begin our discussion I would like to discuss the term communion which I feel might be a source of confusion for some.

When most Christians hear the term communion they understandably equate the term to the Holy Eucharist. However, the term communion has alternate meanings that are possibly more applicable to the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

Definitions:
- An act or instance of sharing
- Intimate fellowship or rapport
- A body of Christians having a common faith and discipline
- A Christian sacrament in which consecrated bread and wine are consumed as memorials of Christ's death or as symbols for the realization of a spiritual union between Christ and or as the body and blood of Christ

In the Communion of Saints we see an intimate fellowship of Christian believers who share many spiritual goods.
The communion of saints is the spiritual solidarity, which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head, and in a constant interchange of supernatural offices. It is the Church.

The participants in that solidarity are called saints by reason of their destination and of their partaking of the fruits of the Redemption.

1 Corinthians 1:2, “to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”

The living, even if they do not belong to the body of the true Church, share in it according to the measure of their union with Christ and with the soul of the Church.

The Catholic Church is traditionally divided into:
- The Church Militant – the living (Ecclesia Militans)
- The Church Triumphant -heaven (Ecclesia Triumphans)
- The Church Suffering -purgatory/Church Penitent/Church Expectant (Ecclesia Penitens or Expectans)

Although these Christians may be separated from each other by the barrier of death, they nonetheless remain united to each other in one Church, and support each other in prayer.

The Latin word militans has a primary meaning of "serving as a soldier, military", but it acquired a secondary meaning of "to struggle, to make an effort", which is the intended sense here.

Christians on earth (the Church Militant) are still struggling against sin
in order that, when they die, they might go to heaven and be members of the Church Triumphant, those who have triumphed over sin.

*This unity or solidarity of the Universal Church is seen in a number of inter-relations within the earthly Church or Church Militant:*  
- Participation in the same faith, catechesis, evangelization, charisms and sacraments  
- Mutual exchange of examples, prayer, and good works/merits

*It is seen between the Church on earth and heaven and purgatory through suffrages, invocation, intercession and veneration.*

*These actions should integrate the transcendent idea of spiritual solidarity between all the children of God.*

Vatican II noted: "By the hidden and kindly mystery of God's will a supernatural solidarity reigns among men. A consequence of this is that the sin of one person harms other people just as one person's holiness helps others."

“Every pious and holy action done by one belongs and is profitable to all, through charity which seeketh not its own.” (Council of Trent)

The Catechism states, "Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others . . . . We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church." CCC 947

"As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund." CCC 947

Vatican II also noted, "The union of the living with their brethren who have fallen asleep in Christ is not broken; the Church has rather
believed through the ages that it gains strength from the sharing of spiritual benefits.”

Through these statements we see the true understanding of communion:
Fellowship, intimate relationship, community and sharing especially of spiritual goods and gifts.

Although Protestants may agree with this in theory, in application most of them (this is especially true of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists) promote an individualistic "me and Jesus" version of Christianity, teaching that the only thing ultimately important is one's own relationship with Christ, independent of any relationship to anyone else.

While it may pay lip service to the communion of saints, in reality most of Protestantism ignores the organic bond of unity between the Christian faithful, a bond that perdures beyond death.

As with most Catholic Doctrine the Communion of Saints was widely accepted until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

Catholics believe this doctrine is solidly founded in the Bible. Protestants disagree with the Catholic interpretation of the scriptures and as we have seen Protestants fail to recognize the concept of an infallible interpreter of scripture (Magisterium) and Sacred Tradition. Instead they adhere to the Protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura referred to by some as the “fatal flaw.”

The Catholic position on Communion of Saints rests on four points:
(1) The Church is Christ's Body
(2) Christ has only one Body, not one on earth and one in heaven
(3) Christians are not separated from each other by death
(4) Christians must love and serve each other.

Let's briefly look at each of these points:

**The Church as Christ’s Body**

Paul’s use of the body as an image to describe the unity Christians have with Christ and each other is particularly vivid: "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another" (Romans 12:4-5).

The Lord alluded to this unity when he prayed, "May [they] be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one" (John 17:22-23).

He used the analogy of himself as a vine and Christians as its branches to illustrate the organic bond Christians share (John 15:1-5).

The teaching that the Church is Christ’s Body is emphasized throughout the New Testament (1 Cor. 10:16, 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:22-23, 3:4-6, 4:4, 15, 25, 5:21-32; Col. 1:18, 3:15; Heb. 13:1-3.)

**Christ has only One Body**

Jesus has only one Body - not one on earth and another one in heaven. Eph. 4:4, “one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call”

Col. 3:15, “And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.”

All Christians, including those in heaven, are members of that one body.
Not separated by death.

Because of Christ's victory over death, a victory in which all Christians share, natural death can't separate Christians from Christ or from each other.

1 Cor. 15:54-56
And when this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

2 Cor. 2:15-16
“For we are the aroma of Christ for God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to the latter an odor of death that leads to death, to the former an odor of life that leads to life.”

2 Tim. 1:10
“...but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...”

That's why Paul exulted, "What will separate us from the love of Christ?... I am convinced that neither death, nor life... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

Since death has no power to sever the bond of Christian unity, the relationship between Christians on earth and those in heaven remains intact.
Christians Must Love and Serve Each Other: Charity

Jesus said that loving one another is second in importance only to loving God (Matt. 22:38, Mark 12:30-31, 1 Cor. 13).

This law of charity is emphasized in the New Testament at every turn, especially in the form of intercessory prayer.

Paul exhorts Christians to pray, supplicate, petition, and intercede for all people. He emphasizes that intercessory prayer "is good and pleasing to God our savior" (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Similar exhortations permeate the New Testament:

"I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the struggle by your prayers to God on my behalf" (Rom. 15:30-32).

"In [Jesus] we have put our hope that he will also rescue us again, as you help us with prayer" (2 Cor. 1:10).

"We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ... we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:4, 9-10).

(See Acts 8:24; 2 Cor. 13:7; Phil. 1:9; Gal. 5:13, 6:2; Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 3:10-12, 4:9-18, 5:14-15, 25; 2 Thess. 1:3, 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:3-4; Heb. 3:19, 13:18; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:22, 3:8; 1 John 4:7-21; 2 John 5.)

The Bible's many exhortations to mutual charity apply to all Christians,
so it would seem to follow that it also applies to Christians in heaven.

A Protestant might object, "These verses refer to Christians on earth only. They say nothing about those in heaven."

But where in the Bible do Protestants get the notion that God's commandment of charity is restricted to those on earth? Aren't the commandments of the Lord eternal, established in heaven as well as on earth? Although the saints in heaven are not explicitly mentioned in these verses, their participation is implied.

The book of Hebrews gives us a compelling vision of the communion of saints in action. Chapter eleven extols the heroism of Old Testament saints, mentioning Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, and even Rahab the harlot.

Chapter twelve reminds us that it's now our turn to run the race toward salvation. The writer encourages us to observe and imitate the heroic virtue of our Old Testament brothers and sisters and follow in their footsteps:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Notice the Old Testament saints are called witnesses who surround us, as though they're cheering us on to victory as we run the race, following in their footsteps.

The saints aren't mere bystanders, devoid of compassion for us their fellow Christians still struggling on earth. Because of their love for us they earnestly intercede on our behalf before the throne of God. (If they didn't intercede, could it be said they in fact love us?)
Two common Protestant objections are that there is no biblical evidence of the saints interceding for us and that those in heaven are oblivious to earthly affairs. These notions are biblically untenable.

In Revelation (the book which gives the clearest view of what the saints in heaven are doing) we find cases of the saints' intercession, and we consistently see that they're very much aware of what's happening on earth. (See Luke 15:7 and Revelation 19:1-4.)

Two such examples: In Revelation 5:8 (see also Rev. 8:3-4) the saints stand before the throne of the Lamb, before the gold altar in the heavenly sanctuary. They sing hymns of praise and offer up the prayers of the saints on earth, prayers that rise like billowing clouds of incense.

In Revelation 6:9-10 the martyred saints are praying imprecatory prayers against their murderers, urging the Lord to avenge their deaths.

Heaven would be a very strange place indeed, and God a very strange Father, if Christians in heaven were prohibited from intercessory prayer.

Protestants must grapple with the question, "Why would God command intercessory prayer by Christians on earth but prohibit it by Christians in heaven?"

The "one mediator" argument

"Since Christ is the one mediator between God and man, asking the saints to intercede for us constitutes a gross infringement on his unique role. This is impermissible. We should just pray to God directly, period."

Actually, Catholics do both--and so do Protestants. Catholics and Protestants both pray directly to God and also ask their fellow
Christians to pray for them. The difference is that Catholics don't restrict the term "Christians" to mean "only Christians on earth."

It must be made clear that the Catholic Church in no way teaches that the saints are mediators in the special sense used in 1 Timothy 2:5. Because of the Incarnation, Jesus has a unique role as mediator.

No saint can take Christ's place as mediator. The Catholic Church does not teach that any Christian is a mediator in the sense used in 1 Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus”

It teaches instead that all Christians are intercessors who, because of Christ's mediatorship, are able to pray for each other.

If asking Christians in heaven to pray for us conflicts with Christ's mediatorship, asking Christians on earth to pray for us conflicts for the same reason.

If 1 Timothy 2:5 eliminates intercession by the Christians in heaven, it eliminates intercession by Christians on earth.

But this would be a serious misreading.

Far from excluding Christians from a share in Christ's mediatorship, Paul is actually emphasizing that we share in it through intercessory prayers. Our intercessions are effectual precisely and only because Christ is the one mediator.

**Praying straight to God**

**Another common argument against prayers to saints is the objection, "Why pray to the saints when you can go straight to God?"

Protestants argue that the following verses imply we should go only to God for our needs:
“Through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18)

"Let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help" (Heb. 4:16)

"We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one" (1 John 2:1).

They feel that asking the saints for prayer is superfluous since, through Jesus, we now have a direct line to God. No "helpers" are necessary.

These arguments ignore the fact that the Bible says God is pleased by intercessory prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-4) and that sometimes, for his own inscrutable reasons; the Lord intervenes only as a result of intercession. 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

“First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.”

Paul emphasizes that God frequently grants gifts "through the prayers of many" (2 Cor. 1:10-11).

The Bible is full of examples of angels and saints interceding with God on behalf of others.

- Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-32).
- Moses intercedes for the people of Israel, begging God not to destroy them, and God relents (Ex. 32:7-14).
- An angel intercedes on behalf of Jerusalem (Zech. 1:12).
- Paul intercedes on behalf of the Church (Col. 1:9-12).
There is a more fundamental reason Protestants object to the invocation of saints. Many of them, especially Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, have a poor understanding of prayer.

Since the highest form of worship Protestants have is prayer (they make no distinction between prayer and worship), Catholic prayers to saints seem blasphemous since we pray to saints.

In fact, the highest form of worship is not prayer but the Mass --- Christ's own sacrifice on Calvary, re-presented for us in space and time.

Although all worship is prayer, not all prayer is worship. Prayers to saints are no more worship than is asking a fellow Christian for prayer.

Before England became a Protestant country and made its universities also Protestant, the word pray meant "to ask" or "to entreat."

As early as 900 the Latin word *precari*, from which the English word prayer derives, was used to mean "an earnest request."

But beginning in Shakespeare’s time and accelerating through the rise of the Puritans, the English language shifted significantly to reflect the theological and ideological bent of new Protestant England.

As the English monarchy systematically stamped out Catholicism, the new religious authorities disparaged "papist" practices such as praying to saints.

The word prayer began to connote worship—the type of worship reserved for God alone.

This is not the Catholic understanding, so "A Husband’s Prayer to St. Joseph," "A Student’s Prayer to St. Aquinas," and the "Prayer to St. Anthony for Lost Things" are not forms of worship to a god but simple requests for intercessory prayer.
Protestant Christians ask their friends on earth to pray for them, but Catholic, Armenian, Coptic, and Orthodox Christians also ask their friends in heaven, the saints, to pray to God on their behalf.

Multiple prayers

There's also the "multiple prayer" objection: "How can the saints hear all those millions of simultaneous prayers, in all those different languages? To be able to do that would require them to be omniscient and omnipresent, but only God is omniscient and omnipresent."

This is faulty reasoning on three levels.

First, since the saints are living in eternity they aren't limited by time and space because they are beyond both.

Second, since there is only a finite number of people on earth, there is only a finite number of prayers at any one time. So, neither omniscience nor omnipresence is required to hear all the prayers ever prayed at one time, no matter how great their number.

Third, it's silly to think the abilities of the saints in heaven are as paltry as are ours. Our inability to understand how the saints hear so many prayers is hardly a reason to deny that they can hear them.

In their glorified state the saints are capable of doing things we can barely imagine: "Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard...what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

In Luke 15:7-10, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, we learn that those in heaven rejoice over the repentance of even one sinner but we have no details about how they can know about individual repentances. But obviously they do.
We know that in heaven we'll be transformed into the image of Christ's glorious, resurrected body. "We shall be like him," Paul assures us (Philippians 3:20-21).

John says, "We are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

In his resurrected, glorified body, Jesus did all sorts of incredible things, such as walk through walls (John 20:19).

Heaven is an amazing place filled with people who, by God's infinite grace, are capable of doing amazing things.

**Necromancy**

**Some raise the "necromancy" objection: "The saints are dead, and the Bible forbids contact with the dead."**

This is a misunderstanding of terms. Necromancy is an attempt to harness diabolical powers in order to, among other things, communicate with "familiar spirits."

The Bible condemns this occultic practice, which includes attempting to communicate with spirits through trances, séances, and incantations (Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 1 Samuel 28:4-18; Isaiah 8:19; 47:12-14.).

Asking saints to pray for us is not necromancy. Asking our fellow Christians in heaven to intercede on our behalf is no different from asking a fellow Christian here on earth to pray for us.

Besides, the saints aren't dead. They're far more alive than we are on earth.
Jesus said, "Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God told him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living. You are greatly misled" (Mark 12:26-27.)

Q. Praying to saints is wrong!

The Bible tells us there is only one mediator between God and men: Jesus. Why do Catholics ignore the scriptures by praying to saints?

Protestants often ask Catholics a question that goes something like this: "Why would anyone seek the aid of a mere manager or underling, when he can go directly to the CEO himself?"

The comparison is, of course, to asking saints to pray for us when we can go "straight to God."

To support this concern, they cite 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus."

And the proper Catholic (and biblical) answer is, "Because we are informed in the Bible that the prayers of certain people are more effective than those of others":

James 5:16-18: "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

This brings to mind other powerful intercessors, such as Abraham and Moses, whose pleas were so strong that they convinced God not to destroy entire cities or peoples.

If, then, the Blessed Virgin Mary were indeed sinless, it would follow that her prayers would have the greatest power, and not only because of her sinlessness but because of her status as Mother of God.

So we ask for her prayers and also ask other saints, because they
have more power than we do, having been made perfectly righteous (according to James 5:16-18).

Most Protestants are quite comfortable asking for prayers from other Christians on earth; why do they not ask those saved saints who have departed from the earth and are close to God in heaven?

After all, they may have passed from this world, but they're certainly alive - more than we are!

Jesus alludes to this fact when He speaks of "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," stating that "He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

Q. The Bible forbids communication with the dead

It is not clear how these Catholic practices are any different from the seances, magic, witchcraft, and necromancy forbidden by the Bible. When you come down to it, aren't Catholics still messing around with dead spirits?

Catholics fully agree that these things are prohibited, but deny that the Communion of Saints is a practice included at all in those condemnations.

The difference is in the source of the supernatural power and the intention.

When a Christian on earth asks a saint to pray for him, God is the one whose power makes the relationship between departed and living members of the Body of Christ possible.

The medium in a seance, on the other hand, is trying to use his/her own occultic powers to "conjure up" the dead - opening up the very real possibility of demonic counterfeit.

Catholics aren't "conjuring" anyone; we're simply asking departed saints to pray for us.
Although a mystery, God can make it possible for them to "hear" and heed our prayer requests.

If this weren't the case, then saints and angels in heaven wouldn't be portrayed as they are in Scripture: intensely active and still involved in earthly affairs.

The Bible teaches that those who die and are saved are fully alive, that they are aware of earthly affairs, and that they love us; therefore it makes perfect sense to ask for their intercession.

Q. Is there a reason for Christians to pray for the dead?

After death comes judgment when the dead are beyond the help of our prayers.

Prayers for the dead are solidly founded on religious and theological tradition, and on the testimony of Scripture.

Far from being a Catholic or even a Christian innovation, prayers for the dead were a normative expression of Jewish religion:

2 Maccabees 12:42,44-45: " Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out...for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin."

Protestants will reply that 2 Maccabees is from the "Apocrypha" but whether it is Scripture or not the passage still shows beyond any doubt that this was the practice of the Jews and that neither they nor the writer saw any connection at all between such prayers and forbidden practices of necromancy and divination.
Christianity is a development of Judaism, which is why Jesus said, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come ... to fulfill them."

**Q. The books of the Apocrypha aren't Scripture.**

**What we really need is a plain statement in the New Testament that prayers for the dead are permissible, and we simply don't see that.**

If there is no such plain statement, there was no need for one, since praying for the dead was an understood and accepted thing in Jewish culture (and Christianity was firmly rooted in that culture and received its theology from it). But St. Paul suggests that we can not only do works on "behalf" of the dead but also pray for them, since he did so himself:

2 Timothy 1:16, 18: "May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus ... may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day - and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus."

Many Protestant commentaries state that here Paul is praying for Onesiphorus, yet few of them acknowledge that he is dead (as seems fairly straightforward from the way Paul refers to him), presumably to avoid the embarrassing inference that would follow.

But Catholics are free to believe both things and accept the natural reading.

Paul isn't trying to "conjure up" anyone, as in occultic practices; he is simply praying for them.

All Christians believe that those who die in Christ (the saved, the elect) are still alive.

If one believes that the person who dies goes straight to hell or heaven, with no intermediate or transitional state, then praying for the dead would be unnecessary and meaningless (since the damned could no longer be helped and the saved would not be in need of any further
help).

But this practice flows logically from the belief in the existence of purgatory.

The latter is most indicated in passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

“…the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire (itself) will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire."

2 Corinthians 7:1, “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.”

There exist other indirect evidences.

Therefore, since an "intermediate" condition or state of purifying suffering after death is indicated in the Bible, it is perfectly acceptable and normal and praiseworthy (and biblical) to pray for people who are in this state (or deemed as likely to be so).

It extends the practice of charity not only to people on the earth, but also to those loved ones who have departed the earth and are with God, but not yet in the fullest, most glorious way (when they shall see Him "face-to-face").

Q. Where are statues and saints in the Bible?
The bible states that we are not to create images nor worship them yet the Catholic faith seems to be filled with statues and images of Mary and the saints which seem to be more revered and treasured than God himself. To me, this appears to contradict the teachings of the bible? Can you explain the justification for all these images?

Q. "Venerating" the saints through statues or icons is idolatry

The Bible forbids the use of "graven images," because worship is to be given to God alone.

But Catholics go far beyond using images as "visual aids." Isn't it clearly idolatry when a Catholic bows before a statue, or "prays" to a plaster or wooden saint?

Statues and icons are fundamentally different from idols, which are expressly intended to replace God.

First of all, veneration of the saints is not worship, which belongs to God only; it is rather an expression of honor - both for the saint and for God, who made the saint holy.

In Exodus 20:4-5 God tells His people that they are not to carve graven images for worship. They are to worship Him alone.

But what is a "graven image"?
This term is defined in dictionaries as "an idol made of wood or stone." In context, then, it is plain that God was forbidding *idolatry*: making a stone or block of wood into a "god."

This is the point. He doesn’t want them to worship anyone or anything but Himself.

Later in Exodus 25:18-19 He tells Moses to actually make two cherubim of beaten gold. These were to adorn the Ark of the Covenant.

In Numbers God tells Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and to put in on a poll. All who looked upon it were healed of their serpent bites. The bronze serpent is felt to be a prefigurement of Christ on the Cross to whom we look for redemptive healing.

These were images and God ordered them.

Images are ok. Worshipping them is not ok.

We don’t worship statues and other representations of God’s holy ones any more than we worship photographs of our loved ones.

Veneration, then, is not at all "unbiblical."

Part of the problem in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue is the definition of terms. Worship is an example.

The word worship is a contraction of "worth-ship" (worth = "worthy" and ship = "state of"), or the state of being worthy.

It derives from the Old English word worðscip and the West Saxon word weordœscipe, both of which mean "condition of being worthy, honored, or renowned."

Simply stated, to worship meant to honor someone who is worthy of honor.
This sense of the term is preserved in the title "Your Worship," an honorific still in use primarily in Britain for certain dignitaries such as mayors, justices of the peace, and magistrates. However, the meaning of the word worship has undergone change.

Today, especially in the United States, worship is understood as that which belongs to God alone. For the honor that is due to the saints, we use the word venerate.

Here is where the Catholic Church’s tradition of using Latin as its official language is most helpful. Whereas English usage is often inexact in theological study, Latin remains more precise.

In response to the early iconoclasm heresy in the Eastern Church (8th century), St. John of Damascus’s distinguishes the type of worship Christians reserve for God alone, arguing:

I believe in one supersubstantial being, one divine Godhead in three entities, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and I adore him alone with the worship of latria.

Generally, the most precise English translation of the word latria is "adoration," which is reserved for God alone. Catholics adore (latria), which is expressed in the sacrificial reverence appropriate to only the Triune God.

The Latin term for the honor properly rendered to the angels and saints in heaven is dulia, and the term for the honor properly rendered to Mary is hyperdulia.

While the terms latria, dulia, and hyperdulia were used in the writings of the early Christian Fathers such as Sts. Augustine and Jerome, the clearest discussion of their differences appears in St. Thomas Aquinas’s thirteenth-century Summa Theologiae.

He writes:
Reverence is due to God on account of his excellence, which is communicated to certain creatures not in equal measure but according to a measure of proportion; and so the reverence that we pay to God,
and that belongs to latria, differs from the reverence that we pay to certain excellent creatures; this belongs to dulia. (ST II-II.103.3)

Thus, according to Aquinas, reverence is rendered to creatures according to the "measure of proportion" of God’s excellence they have received, and only God receives our latria.

On the other hand, dulia is given to "excellent creatures," such as the saints.

The point must be made: God alone receives adoration (latria), whereas the saints are given veneration (dulia).

Q: Can the souls in heaven pray for the souls in purgatory?

It would seem so.

The Catechism says, "In the communion of saints, 'a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth.

Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things'." In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others.

Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin" (CCC 1475).

If the communion of saints allows us to intercede on behalf of those in purgatory and allows them to intercede for us, then there would seem to be little blocking their asking for and receiving the intercession of those in heaven.
Q. Two teachers in the Catholic school my children attend said that guardian angels are something taught to little children and do not really exist. Are guardian angels for real?

Yes, guardian angels are for real.

In the Old Testament, God told Moses: "I am sending an angel before you, to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared. Be attentive to him and heed his voice. Do not rebel against him, for he will not forgive your sin. My authority resides in him" (Exodus 23:20-21).

The Church’s longstanding belief in guardian angels is based on Matthew 18: 10, where Jesus, after warning against scandalizing little children, said: "See that you never despise one of these little ones. I assure you, their angels in heaven constantly behold my heavenly Father's face."

Recall, too, that when Peter was miraculously released from prison, his friends said, "It must be his angel" (Acts 12: 15)

Q. Can you explain how the angels Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel can be called saints when they never lived on earth as the canonized saints did?

According to the dictionary, the word "saint" comes from the Latin sanctus, which means holy or sacred. The word usually refers to those persons, now presumed to be in Heaven, whose lives of extraordinary holiness and heroic virtue while on earth have been recognized by the Church, usually by the process called canonization.

However, another dictionary meaning for saint is "angel," which makes sense since these purely spiritual beings are also noted for their great
holiness.

Thus, it is appropriate to call Michael a saint because he remained faithful to God and led the heavenly hosts to victory in the battle against the fallen angels (Revelation 12:7-9), as well as Gabriel, who announced to Mary that she was to be the Mother of the Savior (Luke 1:26-38), and Raphael, who identified himself as "one of the seven angels who enter and serve before the Glory of the Lord" (Tobit 12:15).

Q. How do angels do battle? Can an angel die or be wounded? Can angels endure physical pain? Isn't it far-fetched to depict Saint Michael with a sword?

Angels are purely spiritual beings with intelligence and free will.

Since they have no bodies, they cannot die, be wounded, or suffer physical pain. They usually take on human form when they intervene in human affairs, but they are not subject to human limitations. They exert power on our world through an act of the will.

For scriptural examples of angelic power, see chapter 19 of Genesis (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah), chapter 24 of 2 Samuel (the beginning of the destruction of Jerusalem), and 2 Kings 19 (the destruction of 185,000 Assyrians).

St. Michael is usually depicted in art with a sword to symbolize his driving the bad angels from Heaven (Revelation 12:7-9), but this is only an artist's conception.

Q. Why did the Fathers of Vatican II change the feasts of so many saints on the Church calendar?
The Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* said that to prevent the feasts of the saints from taking "precedence over the feasts which commemorate the very mysteries of salvation, many of them should be left to be celebrated by a particular church, or nation, or family of Religious.

Only those should be extended to the Universal Church which commemorate saints who are truly of universal importance" (n. 111).

In 1969, Pope Paul VI ordered a reorganization of the calendar of saints which led to the removal of more than 200 saints from the calendar and shifting of the feast days of many others, most commonly to mark the date of the saint’s death, if known.

For those who were dropped from the universal calendar, it is obvious that with thousands of saints and only some 300 days in the year, it would not be possible to give each saint his or her day.

Some were removed because their feast was on the same day as a greater saint, others because they lacked universal significance, and still others because there was insufficient information about them.

This latter criterion caused great anguish among Catholics when such popular saints as Christopher were dropped. This was not a declaration that Christopher never existed, or that he did not attain great holiness. It was simply a judgment that the only thing certain about him was his name, so he couldn't be presented as a model of heroic virtue. Nor did it mean that one could not still have a devotion to a particular saint; only that the saint would no longer be listed on the universal calendar.

**Conclusion**

**What is the communion of saints?**
To put it too simply, the communion of the saints is the Church, but in a sense not often used by most people.

We so often use the word "Church" to refer to the Church on earth, but the Church, as expressed in the Apostles' Creed, not only includes those of us struggling here on earth, but also those who are now with God in heaven as well as those on their way to God in purgatory.

In short, the communion of saints is the whole Church, including its heavenly and purgatorial branches.

All the members of the communion are bound together under Christ their head, forming one mystical body, and cooperate by sharing their merits and prayers with one another.

Thus, the members of the communion in heaven and in purgatory can intercede with us to the Father, and we can help to lighten the burdens of the souls in purgatory through our prayers for them.

It is this interaction between all the members of Christ's body that is properly called the communion of saints.

The belief in a spiritual relationship linking the souls on earth with those who have gone before us has its roots in sacred Scripture and has been confirmed by decrees of the Second Council of Nicaea, the Council of Florence, the Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council.