

# CONTEMPLATION AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

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**I** BELIEVE in the communion of saints. I believe that just as our contemplation of God prepares us for the eternity of union with him which Christ came to inaugurate, so our communion with the saints prepares us for eternal life: the life promised to all who believe in Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary. By contemplating God I mean looking at him, resting in him, simply, silently, according as he gives us the grace. By communion with the saints, I mean meditating on their lives, learning to know them, to love them and to depend on their intercession; so that we come to know and to love ourselves more, to live in greater love and harmony with all people, here and now, to have greater confidence in God's love and power, and to trust more truly his purpose and his way of accomplishing it.

There is quite a contrast between these two activities. The one seems somewhat passive, detached from everyday life; whilst the other is more actively and directly concerned with it. In fact, they are both ways of being disposed towards God and man, time and eternity; two contrasting ways ordered to the same end: eternal union with God.

God is for ever calling everyone to return to him, to share his life here and hereafter. 'He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2, 4). The saints have been chosen and given to the Church to help us to find our way to the Father, through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit: and this especially in times of change and confusion, of stress and persecution, when help and understanding from those around us is limited or appears to be lacking entirely.

The Holy Trinity leads us into a deeper awareness of the eucharistic communion we are meant to enjoy with one another in them. Communion with God in the Holy Spirit is of course primary: without it we cannot enjoy communion with the saints. The Holy Spirit, the Counsellor whom the risen Christ has sent to lead us into all truth (Jn 16, 7. 13), is with us with his gifts to give us the direction we seek, the necessary graces which enable us to contemplate God and to

commune with the saints, without neglecting the work of ministry in Jesus's name to the world around us. In fact, in so far as we overflow with contemplative love and are instructed in the school of the saints, we enter more effectively into the sufferings of that life which is struggling to be born anew today. For we too are called to contend against the same principalities and powers (Eph 6, 12), the same diabolical evils and vicious tendencies in ourselves and in others which the saints had to combat, in order to bring forth human-kind to the new order of knowing and loving virtue, and the goodness, truth, beauty, justice and peace of Almighty God.

First in prayer, and then in apostolic works, the Holy Spirit is the prime mover of our soul. 'He helps us in our weakness when we do not know how to pray as we ought' (Rom 8, 26). The receptive soul awakens to his movement, lets the mind follow his lead as he draws our powers to whatever form of contemplation is good for our total well-being in time and at each moment.

It would seem that to try to programme one's form of prayer, meditation and contemplation according to patterns of the past would be to usurp the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. It is he who is always leading towards more perfect forms. On our behalf he takes what has been good in our past, and adapts, renews and recasts it for our present use. Always he brings into being something which has been existent potentially, but which has had to await the moment of wisdom for its actualization. We cannot imagine what is possible for him: 'To God, all things are possible'. We can only hold ourselves open to infinite possibility, and in humility allow him to call forth from us that which, in union with him, reveals to us surprising and joyous wonders of knowledge and love.

But we must walk delicately. To attempt to force one's mind into the channels of divine contemplation as the only worthwhile goal of devotional and meditative activity would normally be a lack of awareness which would amount to a mode of resistance to the Holy Spirit; further, it would represent an ignorance, a heedless violation of one's person, in that God works with us 'respectfully', according to our present capacity for receiving himself and his gifts. Such action would indicate both ignorance and pride: ignorance of the human spirit in the ways of God; pride and presumption concerning one's present state of assimilation to the 'God of my life'. By thus directing one's own self in devotion to God, the over-eager heart can close itself off to the enriching sources of knowledge and love, and to that fellowship which makes us his co-operators (cf 2 Cor 6, 1).

One cannot enter into true relation with the living God, and enjoy the raptures of contemplation unhindered, unless one is also in true relation with others. By true relation, I do not mean a state of perfection, but the only form and degree of loving relation with others that is possible at any given moment for the loving soul, according to God's present purpose and enabling grace: the relationship of which Paul speaks, when he writes: 'If possible, *so far as it depends upon you*, live peaceably with all' (Rom 12, 8: italics mine).

In prayer, the contemplation of God and communion with the saints together comprise the totality of loving and intelligent relationship. The Holy Spirit, the gentle Counsellor, nudges and woos the uncertain spirit into whatever exercise of personal powers is good for the learning soul. Indeed, the end and aim of each soul's endeavour is unending rest in and enjoyment of God; but the Spirit alone knows himself and his creation perfectly; he alone is the prime mover of all that is; he alone is able to direct towards and lead into perfect relation each and every pilgrim soul.

This perfect relation is not simply God and myself in loving union; it must involve all my brethren. Jesus said, 'Love God, and your neighbour as yourself'. The test of my love for God is my love for others as myself. My wholehearted devotion to and affirmation of God is simultaneously a wholehearted devotion to and affirmation of others and myself. God receives the primacy that is his due, the primacy that is essential to *our* well-being; but his primacy is not a denial or negation of the devotion due to his creature-man, the creation of his love, the object of his saving, searching, reclaiming power. It is fitting, then, that we should spend time in devotion to and meditation on the saints, not the devotion due to God but the devotion due to a fellow-creature; not the meditation wherein one's thoughts handle with reverent care the precious matters pertaining to the Almighty and his ways with men, but the matters pertaining to our fellows and their ways with God. It is really two sides of the same coin, the treasure of the Kingdom.

The contemplation of God and communion with the saints may seem antithetical when one first begins to exercise one's faculties in conscious endeavour. But with perseverance, it becomes clear that it is rather like learning to exercise our different bodily muscles properly, as originally designed and intended, using some without overburdening the rest, and working towards the goal of a true equilibrium between repose and activity. Let us consider some of these seemingly antithetical factors, which, in reality, are parts of the same whole.

*Self-abandonment and self-consciousness*

First, there is self-abandonment and self-consciousness. In contemplating my God I am, as it were, lifted out of myself, and wholly possessed by him. I withhold nothing of myself; rather, wooed by his love and driven by my own desire for him, I abandon myself completely to whatever he chooses to do with me, or reveal to me of himself. The freedom to give myself to him without fear, the trust he has nurtured in me so carefully, the assurances of his love and desire for me, the certainty that he desires my highest good: these in themselves are sufficient reward for this act and state of self-abandonment. They precede the act, they constitute the state, they strengthen the soul who thus re-affirms their truth. Anything beyond this, the slightest movement of the Spirit, as he reaches forth to grasp the surrendered self in tender and holy embrace, is to be led into such rapture that, if it were possible, I would remain there forever, desiring no more of self but only all of God: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here . . . '.

In the communion of saints, however, my self-consciousness is enhanced. I remain, as it were, within myself, present to myself, as I meet with them by faith in the Holy Spirit. I am in fellowship with them in him, and in the Holy Spirit with him *and* them, through faith. Conscious of God, conscious of them, I feel myself bound by finiteness. It is almost as if courtesy to them prevents self-abandonment to God at this time; for one cannot ignore the others, even though their first desire is also for him. Thus, I remain in myself and conscious of myself, at the same time as I am conscious of God and his beloved saints. Not I but we are in company together with him. We are God's possession; I and he and they in harmonious relation. I do not withhold myself: rather I contain myself out of respect for and to them. Brought into fellowship with them in the Holy Spirit, I abide with them in love, in God's love; and yet, apart from our common knowledge of and love for God, I am conscious of the limitation of my own actual knowledge of them.

*Transcendence and historical perspective*

Self-abandonment in contemplation does not foster this awareness of finiteness; for in my contemplation of God, I participate in his infinity. Here I am utterly lost in the awareness of his omniscience; I am transported out of and beyond myself in a moment of ineffable transcendence. My communion with the saints reminds me of my finiteness, my limitation of actual knowledge; by their presence in

the Spirit they bring to my mind historical perspective. They are present to me as they are now, people of the Church in glory; and also as they were, of the Church militant. Though their host is numerous, I know but few of them by reputation; and I realize that there is much that I need to learn about their lives. The little I know of them humiliates me in a way in which what I know of God does not. I see them individually, living out their few years on earth, each in his own time, proven, approved, multi-talented or singly-endowed; yet faithful, responsive, receptive and enduring to the end, good and faithful stewards, loving and obedient sons and daughters of God; whereas I have not yet attained to the crown of life. My communion with them reminds me of this. At the same time, whilst I look more closely at them as they each appear in history, my humiliation is suffused with hope, the same hope in God which sustained them. For I see each one wrestling with the contemporary conditions of his age: the circumstances which helped to form, but which could have deformed, each one of them. From their various negativities each one struggled, with grace, to be free; so that, with grace, each could work to conform the times in which he lived more closely to the rule of Christ the King; and how much was transformed by grace in the process.

If the contemplation of my God grants me blessed transcendence, a freedom from the world to which I so naturally conform, then the communion of saints fastens me firmly to my own assigned point in history, to the world of my own days. Contemplation frees me from being conformed to this world; communion with the saints ensures that I will be transformed in this world.

#### *Timelessness and temporality*

There is yet another contrast, that of timelessness and temporality. Caught up into the very bosom of the Father, one is freed from the tyranny of time: ' . . . with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Pet 3, 8). To rest in him in contemplation allows a falling away of cares and concerns; not in irresponsible escapism, but with confidence in his infinitely greater care and concern, his effective power, the way in which he moves 'from end to end, ordering all things sweetly'. Beginning, end and process between, lose their boundaries in one vast immediacy: an immediacy not of this particular moment of time, but of relationship. For here, past, present and future disappear as meaningless, unnecessary, non-essential.

This quality of immediate relation with the saints depends on my co-existence with them in the Holy Spirit of Christ. It is in the Spirit that we are in timeless relation with one another. Temporality characterizes our shared human nature. Because of this, the communion of saints, and each one individually, brings to mind the time of their living: not so much of their appointed time in history, but the quantity and quality of their days. The formative years, the sterile years, the time redeemed, the pace of their day-to-day living, the times of the Spirit's cultivation, their growth-time to maturity, the varying degrees of fruitfulness measured in number of years, the short lives, the long lives: such variety. Communion with them promotes in me both urgency and peace. There is no time now for me to waste, every moment is precious and important: my times, as their times, are in God's hands. I cannot hurry or hinder the moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, the passage of his past, present and future. I can only accept the due order of the days: for the ephemeral is of the very nature of human endeavour.

The God whom we contemplate is the eternal One, the unchanging 'I am', the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and you and me, loving and living timelessly. The saints with whom we now participate in the fellowship of the Spirit, each appeared in time, for a time, using time to glorify eternity; they are, each one of them, a beneficent attestation to the temporal.

#### *Spacelessness and geographic orientation*

Then there is spacelessness: I in God, without limit, without boundary, no height, no depth, no length, no breadth: simply a living and an abiding. Where I am geographically is inconsequential; for, as I contemplate him whom all space cannot contain, the boundlessness of his own essence permeates the container of my soul in such a way that he in me transfigures my existence. Space is not a factor in contemplation. God is not out there or up there or over there or in there or anywhere in particular in space. God simply is: and it is himself whom I am called to contemplate.

In contrast, in the communion of saints, geographical orientation is important in several ways. First, combined with the aspects of historicity and temporality, to locate each where they lived geographically, assures my worship *with* them rather than *of* them. I can call to mind their earthly life. I can turn up the records of the

places where they lived. But now I meet them by faith, in the Holy Spirit, their existence unconfused with God's existence, yet at the same time infused with his. Thus I heed the warning that came to St John, when he fell down to worship at the feet of the angel: 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book. Worship God' (Apoc 22, 9).

Secondly, in my communion with them, when this is a conscious coming into union with them, the knowledge of where they were born, where they were when God called them, whither it was that he led them, where they served and glorified him, from which point on this earth's surface they departed for the place prepared for them by our Lord: all this helps me to see my own situation as one of unrealized possibility. In jungles, in forests, in crowded cities, in a quiet study, on top of a pillar, in a desert, by a sea, anywhere, everywhere, God has had his saints to serve him. Those who have been in other countries make my presence here in this country important and necessary. Those who have been called in one place, and have remained to serve there and nowhere else, encourage my contentment with my station. Those who have been called in one place, and have followed the lead of the Lord in a life of wandering or homeless living, encourage my readiness to leave my present location should the command be given. No place on the earth's surface or in the heavens is to be neglected or despised, for God has made it all. He has commanded that we fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion over all things (Gen 1, 28), that we reach and teach all people in all the changing nations wherever we find them (Mt 28, 18); and he has taken the initiative by sending out saints, 'beginning from Jerusalem' (Lk 24, 47).

In the third place, merely to think of the saints individually — one from Israel, one from Philippi, one from Rome, from Germany, France, Ireland, Norway, America, Japan, India, Africa, each one of the corporate whole of God's people — fills the heart and mind with the reality of his hope. For just as 'he has made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation' (Acts 17, 26), so he has been calling men and women from all nations, to lead the way for this pilgrim people, in their return to the one from which and the One from whom we have departed. The saints are a glorious sign of the movement toward the place which Jesus has prepared for us (cf Jn 14, 1-4).

*Personhood and womanhood*

A further distinction comes to mind when I think of the inner effects of devotion to the saints. There is the experience of coming to a knowledge, though one which is still shrouded with a beneficent mystery, of myself as a whole person, a fully integrated human being, belonging to the new creation, divinized humankind, in which there is neither male nor female. To contemplate my God, to be brought into union with him, to be drawn by his Spirit to participate in the divine nature: all this communicates a certain supernatural awareness. It is not that my sexuality is obliterated or in some way suspended; rather it is that this ontological difference in my human personality, having become by grace a blessed pathway to the Father, is now taken beyond the laws of nature, and finds its fulfilment in the Supreme Wisdom from which, in the eternal Son, it emanated. An interior translation of language is effected by the Holy Spirit in communication with my spirit; and words descriptive of human nature are now capable of interpretation in terms of this new relation to the divine nature. The sacred phrases flood my mind anew:

Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? 'My Son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives'. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Heb 12, 5-7.)

No longer do I experience the necessity to insist on my identity as a daughter, as a female. For in the contemplation of God it is I, a human person, who can rest content in the Divine Person in singular simplicity.

Communion with God conditions our communion with the saints, so that this given awareness of personhood is characteristic also of our view of one another. However, when we regard one another as members of the body of Christ, the sexuality of each human person thus called into this supernatural relation is a factor of irrefragable importance. I am a woman: I cannot be other than what I am. Yet there is no need for me to be other than a woman in order to do the will of God. The glorious company of the saints assures me that this is so. For here are men and women, male and female, doing the deeds of the Kingdom in the full bloom of their dedicated sexuality: some,



like Mary, only able to do the particular will of God because of her sex, others thus enabled almost in spite of their sex.

Seeing the countless men and women called by God to serve him in chastity, whether in celibacy or in marriage, relieves me of anxiety for my sexual nature. I see that my fulfilment of the purpose for which I was born comes by doing the will of God; that what he would have me do is that which is eminently suitable to me as a woman, since that is what I am. It is as woman that I serve him: it is as woman that I relate to other men and women. The catalogue of saints, carefully scrutinized, reveals a marvellous inter-dependence of men and women on one another in the service of the Kingdom; and in communion with them in the Spirit, my femaleness is seen as a cherished thing, a needed thing, that which others need in me. In relation to the individual men and women in that blessed company, I experience myself as woman, fully accepted as such, blessedly free and safe to be fully female, without misunderstanding of intention or contradiction of purpose.

#### *Sanctifier and sanctified*

Rapt in contemplation, senses stilled, mind unquestioning, will at rest, spirit held: thus is it that my soul entertains the Sanctifier. I am not perfectly pure, yet he purifies me by allowing me to rest in his perfection. Nothing that I have done or do now, or have not done or do not do now, can achieve such a purpose in me. The Sanctifier alone communicates holiness to me in contemplation; and my spirit perceives this difference within me, my mind understands and notes the effects of his presence. None other than the Sanctifier sanctifies.

In the communion of saints I am in the blessed company of the sanctified, but as an immature child, dependent on the help, encouragement, example and loving kindness of older brothers and sisters. Whereas in contemplation I am renewed in passivity, in communion with the saints I am sustained in activity; for I see in their holy example the works that befit sanctity. The Sanctifier alone, knowing the spirit of their souls, can tell whether their wordly deeds were those of a penitent seeking sanctification, the blessed fruit of sanctity, or a mixture of both. And so it is with me. In God I delight in the blessed fruits of sanctification: with the help of the saints, their spurring example and active fellowship, I still seek these fruits. In God I learn the nature of the fruits, since they are of his Spirit; with the saints I learn how to be disposed so as to obtain these fruits.

*Justifier and justified*

In the contemplation of God my faith finds justification. Brought to the very throne of Grace by the Son who bids me come (cf Rom 5, 1-2), I am given what I need to free me from the penalty for my offences against God and man: love, mercy forgiveness, freedom. Nothing I have done or can do merits the invitation to contemplation. The Justifier gives the invitation and helps me to respond. I have the knowledge of faith: that the divine justice whom I contemplate has brought about that which enables everyone to be what one is intended to be, a son or daughter of God. This is the reconciliation of God and man through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and glorification of the divine Son. Enclosed in his loving embrace, I experience afresh this freedom from the burden of unregenerate nature.

In the communion of saints I join forces with those who are justified, not so much by some decisive affirmation of faith in the Son of God issuing from my intellect, no matter how well disposed, but rather by the life-long activities of faith, with a will wholly committed, and a self totally surrendered to life in him. It is not so much that I am invited into their company. Rather I beg to join it, not on the strength of anything I do, but on the strength of my faith in the One who has justified them and brought forth from them works of justice, radiant with love and mercy. The love, the faith, the hope I have with them in the fellowship of the Spirit are one and the same in nature. The variety of works, from a crust of bread given to a hungry soul to a correct theological definition of an obscure point of holy doctrine written for erring souls, has been inspired by the same Spirit. Each befits the natural capacity of each one, and is endemic to the graceful preparation of each justified soul.

*Omnipotence and limited power*

In contemplation I come into the presence of power: a power so utterly great and so finely controlled as to pierce to the division of soul and spirit (Heb 4, 12), so as to enter therein to take the proffered possession. Without, apparently, disturbing in the slightest his whole created realm, including my own human nature, God makes his supernatural way, revealing to me not only the faculties of my soul but the supernatural realities for which they were designed. The world of sense-experience bows in humbled awe at his miraculous revelation: the whole created universe could indeed be imagined to

fit into the tender hands of the Master Creator. But it is not so much the vastness of his power that staggers my mind and hushes me in wordless wonder. It is the particularity with which he wields it. The energy which brought forth, set in motion and sustains the whole of created reality, using years to reveal the substance of his day, abides for precious moments with me in concentration; letting me know that I, out of all the world, am dwelling in him now, so that my poor powers are expanded by sharing his unlimited dynamism.

At the time of contemplation, Omnipotence creates no disturbance; yet what issues forth from such encounter, beginning with my internal world, changes the very structure of the universe. Blessed communion with the saints confirms in me that this is so; for I see each one, with a limited measure of power natural to humanity, being joined in the purpose of God with the power which is natural to divinity: and then, and only then, thinking thoughts, and saying words, and doing deeds that are right and fitting for the sons and daughters of God. By their own confession they acknowledge his omnipotence and their limited power. By their lives they bear testimony to this wondrous joining together, in which God concentrates and man expands in power, so as to transform the world.

#### *Pleroma and partiality*

Contemplation of God brings apprehension of the divine *pleroma*: the whole of created reality in its most staggering magnitude and intricacy, the world of which I am a part, enfolded lovingly within the womb-like fulness, without which there is nothing, and from which all that is proceeds: wholeness, complete being, that to which nothing can be added, other than which there is nothing; shrouded mystery, constantly revealing unbounded fulness, containing all in uncontained presence. The Spirit transmits knowledge of such *pleroma* in one, simple, graceful opening of love and truth and beauty. Here again, my soul expands in a completeness beyond its natural capacity; self-contained soul, pervaded by the divine fulness, bursts the bonds of self in silent ecstatic explosion. My soul unfolds in God's enfoldment, experiencing his totality.

By contrast, the communion of saints gives balancing awareness of a sanctified partiality, an individual bias transformed by grace to make beneficent contribution to the whole. Each of the saints, with his own particular experience of life, his own peculiar world-view and vision of God, gives distinctive expression to the same Truth from whom all

derive fulness of life. I find contentment in their company, comforted by the knowledge that, since it is beyond my human power and unnatural to my constitution, even aided by the fulness of grace, to be an exact embodiment of the divine *pleroma*, I, like them, am called to witness to him in whom the whole fulness of deity does dwell bodily (Col 1, 9). In my single little person the divine image can be seen by a loving and forgiving eye; and my very partialities, peculiar characteristics and fragmentary glimpses of the supreme reality are absolutely essential to an integrated and intimate knowledge of God.

In the saints, I see each member of the Body whole: complete in himself, but lacking wholeness and incomplete by himself. What one has, another lacks; what one is, another is not. Yet together in the Spirit of Christ, all possess all (1 Cor 3, 21-23); and, in spite of individual partiality, each is straightened according to the Truth into whom we are all drawn.

#### *Omniscience and appropriation*

In awe, I contemplate that all-knowing God. As I gaze upon him with the yes of my soul, I experience myself as known. Nothing hidden, nothing obscure, nothing mysterious, nothing unknown in him or to him, he rests in self-contented, self-contained, self-informed sublimity. Everything in me and about me, known beforehand to him, takes on a precious character; for when my own sense of commonness and worthlessness would blind me and bind me, I come to him whom I love by his invitation, responding to his wooing. What is hidden and obscure, mysterious and unknown to me, is not so to him. In the light of his omniscience my discontent sees the way to rest, my indiscretion finds wisdom, my mediocrity receives the inspiration of divine science.

Learning from the saints, I see that whereas each was united to the font of holy wisdom and divine knowledge through the Holy Spirit, so that everything knowable was within their ken, nevertheless, as they lived out their few years of life here on earth, they were given the power to appropriate only that which was essential to the particular work the Lord had assigned to them. Not one was omniscient; each saw through a mirror darkly; yet each had access through the Spirit to omniscience. Each knew in part; yet each was known completely. Each spoke the truth of God, having been given divine insight into the mysteries of God appropriate to the work he had to do and the time in which he was called. Even though none possessed complete knowledge, what was clear they each related clearly; and what was yet hidden to the

understanding, they perceived intuitively, avoiding speaking of what they did not know, but emphasizing what they did: a knowledge appropriate to the needs of their day, appropriated through the intercourse of the human spirit with the Holy Spirit the Counsellor, guiding each of them into all truth.

*Imagelessness and imagination*

This contemplation of God is utterly different from the exercise of a mind intent on reaching out to penetrate the far reaches of infinity, questing, searching, probing, swooping here, swaying there, eager for an image acceptable to the sum total of one's conceptual life. It is rather the repose of a mind humbled by the Spirit, open to receive knowledge, through its mediation, of the invisible God: it is without images. The mind's duty is to understand, not to propose. The slightest conceptualization, the slightest construction of anything already known, somewhere seen, previously imagined, erects a barrier to pure contemplation. Even the effort of the mind to imagine nothingness is an insidious temptation to an inordinate activity which can only end in frustration of the spirit, as the mind, deluded, meditates on an image of nothingness, a false substitute for God. Quiescent, receptive, the mind waits its turn as the spirit of man in union with the Spirit of God is given, in reciprocity, knowledge and love (knowledge of love, and love of knowledge) from the very depths of God. The spirit, disengaged, gives to the waiting mind the sweet fruit of its discernment, which the mind then enjoys with bursts of ecstatic rapture, as each new truth becomes apparent to its awareness. No images yet. The mind receives the Spirit's communication of 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor 2, 9), as God reveals it through the intercourse of Spirit with spirit, which ruminates on it, and prepares to use it for the purpose for which it has been given. Time then for images, as the faithful soul seeks to impart this given understanding of God to others who also possess the Spirit, couching his words in a rich kaleidoscope of images drawn from natural life, in earnest endeavour to illuminate supernatural life. 'The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor 2, 14).

In communion with the saints, however, the imagination is fruitfully and fittingly employed. In fellowship with the Holy Spirit,

spirit reaches forth to greet the waiting company. Known facts from scripture, tradition, authentic biography and written words of witness of historic persons, combine in the mind to give substance to the invisible body. Imagination works to delineate the various members of the body, to recall this one and that one, belief allowing boldness in configuration, self-awareness alerting one to correction of vision. Here the mind is deliberately employed to reach forth, grasp, hold, confront, join the images to which it appeals in faith, not for the purpose of worshipping them, but to join them in worshipping God.

The sanctified imagination is in no wise fooled in this; for, unlike the imagination of the unbelieving, lawless ones, of whom scripture attests that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually (Gen 6, 5), this power of the mind is controlled by the strictest discipline. The mind strives only to act in obedience to the spirit, employing only the truths of faith and authenticated facts of human knowledge, rigorous in submitting to constant criticism, watchful for signs of falsehood and delusion, sensitive to the need for revision in the light of perfecting knowledge: no fixed images, no static conceptions, no bringing a body of saints into being by imagining them, but humbly picturing that which already is, to the best of one's present ability and growing knowledge.

I said in the beginning that this activity, contemplating God and meditating on his saints, is like two sides of the same coin of the kingdom. It is also like kneeling before the blessed Sacrament. No matter where we find the Host reserved — in cathedrals or chapels, thronged or hushed; in tabernacles, simple or ornate, rough-hewn or superbly sculptured, large or small, of wood or stone, metal or wicker-work, inlaid with gold and precious stones or cloaked in cotton, in cities, towns and villages, convents and monasteries, schools and hospitals, gracing the countries of the world like a jewel-encrusted wedding-band binding all of creation to himself — it is the one invisible God whom we contemplate, the one Christ whom we adore in the magnificent variety of his resting places. Yet it is also unlike these tabernacles, in that the saints are living stones, built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2, 5), in communion with whom we have been called to participate in the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to comprehend with them what is the breadth and length and height and depth: to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph 3, 18-19).