

# Communion of saints



Do the saints in heaven see and know all that we are doing? If so, do they have disappointment or sorrow when they see us sinning?

– **William Duncan**, via email

We are in the realm of speculative theology, and thus, precise answers to such questions are not possible. However, reasoning from Scripture, it does seem that the saints have some general awareness of the situation on earth and pray. Revelation 8:4 speaks of the prayers of the saints ascending like incense before God. Revelation 6:10 also shows the souls of the martyrs beneath the altar in heaven asking God how much longer before he avenged their blood. This presumes some knowledge by them that injustice and resistance to the Faith still prevails on earth. These texts are debated, but tradition has allowed an interpretation that includes knowledge by the saints of heaven about the conditions on earth.

Your question asks about detailed knowledge of very personal aspects of peoples' lives. To some degree we must conclude that the saints in heaven know only what God permits them to know and see. There is no purely human capacity to see hidden things beyond what our senses and awareness can supply. Thus, if the saints do "see" us, it is only as members of the Body of Christ.

Consider an analogy. My right hand can work with my left in accomplishing a task, but not because each hand has a separate set of eyes or other cognitive abilities. Rather, they work together through the head of my body, my brain and will. They "know" what to do, but not independently of the head.

It is likely this way with the ability of the saints to know

or see things on earth. They know what they know, and only what they need to know, through the head of the body, Christ. While it is true that saints, as persons, are not simply mindless extensions of the Body of Christ, it does not follow that they become all-seeing or all-knowing either. Just as my hand does not need detailed “knowledge” about what is going on in my kidneys, it does not follow that my deceased grandmother needs detailed knowledge about every specific thing I do.

As for disappointments experienced by the saints when we do something bad, even if they do know, they likely also know what the end will be since they will have a more eternal perspective. They would not perceive our lives like a movie. If they see our lives through Christ the head, as they must, they also would know how our actions fit into our last end. Thus, disappointment seems difficult when one knows more comprehensively through Christ as to the final outcomes.

## **In vitro fertilization**

Back in 1979 my husband and I had recourse to an early form of in vitro fertilization. I received advice from priests that it was not a sin to do this. Since then I have wondered if we did actually sin in doing this.

– **Linda Paesel**, via email

There was sin in the sense that human conception was taken outside the marital act and likely a number of embryos were lost in the process. But your blameworthiness is minimal since you did not know the details of this newer process and received faulty advice. You acted in good faith, even though the act itself was wrong, and serious sin cannot be attributed where there is a lack of sufficient knowledge.

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