

Could This Be Idol Worship?

Many Christians doubt these practices. It can be difficult to get used to praying to anyone other than God. It might even feel like idolatry to do such a thing. But, keep in mind: a Catholic's intentions when he prays to God are different from his intentions when he prays to the saints.

Praying to the saints is not idolatry, for the simple fact that Catholics do not worship the saints, nor do we intend our prayers to them to be an act of worship. When we pray to God, it is an act of worship because to pray to God is to acknowledge that He is the Creator of all things, we are his humble creatures, and we depend on Him for all things.

When we pray to the saints, however, it is simply to invoke their intercession. God (not any saint) is the ultimate source of all answers to prayer. We want to communicate our needs to the saints because, as we've already seen, we know that they understand the unique fears and anxieties that we face, and we know that they can make a perfect entreaty to the Lord for us. No faithful Catholic would ever turn the saints into gods, or try to derive secret or hidden knowledge from them, or enter into any type of false worship of the saints. Catholics consider themselves bound by Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching of the Church to worship God and Him alone.

Isn't Jesus the One Mediator?

You may also be wondering how praying to the saints would square with Paul's reminder that Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim 2:5-6). The key here is to understand what Paul means by "mediator." First, here is the passage in question:

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time."

Now, a mediator is someone who works between two estranged parties to bring them to agreement. Paul basically tells us in vs. 6 that this is what he has in mind, when he refers to Jesus as the one who "gave himself as a ransom for all." God and mankind are the two estranged parties, and Jesus brought them together again by "paying the ransom," by dying for us.

The saints don't compete with this one mediator because they don't (and can't) do what He did. The saints don't pay the price for all humanity's sins. Jesus Christ is the one who "has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14), not the saints.

Praying to the Saints Gives Glory to God.

This discussion of what Jesus has done for us brings us to a final point: ultimately, praying to the saints is all about Jesus. He is the one who granted them victory over death. He is the Head that unites all the members of the Body together. He is the one who hears the prayers of the saints – both those on earth and in heaven – and answers them faithfully. He is the reason why we have any hope of being where the saints are: alive with God forever.

And so, we Catholics say: Give glory to God! Pray to the saints!

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Prayer of consecration to Jesus

God our Father, I believe that you created me out of love. In a thousand ways I have sinned against you. I repent of all of my sins. Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending your Son to die for me, to save me from hell. I choose this day to renew my covenant with you and to place Jesus at the center of my heart. I surrender to Him as Lord over my whole life.

I ask you now to flood my heart and soul with your Holy Spirit and to grant me the gift of new life. Give me the grace and courage to live as a missionary disciple for the rest of my days. Amen.

Praying to the Saints



SAINT PAUL
STREET EVANGELIZATION

Praying to the Saints

To non-Catholic Christians, there aren't very many religious practices that seem as peculiar as praying to the saints. "Shouldn't we only be praying to God?" "What could a dead person possibly do for us?" Even though, from the earliest days of the Church, Christians have been praying to the virtuous men and women who have gone before us (i.e., asking them to intercede with God), it is still important for us to consider why this is worthwhile and if it is validated by the Bible. Does God approve? Let's break open God's Word and see whether it sanctions the practice of praying to the saints.

The Saints: Alive in Christ

At the core of the practice of praying to the saints is the belief that the saints are alive in Christ and full members of the community of believers, the Mystical Body of Christ. As St. Paul proclaims:

"For I am sure that neither *death*, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

When we live a life of grace and virtue, when we "put to death the deeds of the body," then we will live (Rom 8:13). Yes, every person's time on this earth must come to an end, but if we die in grace and righteousness, then we'll live forever with God in heaven. The fact that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – prophets who died a long time ago – can still be declared by Jesus to be the God of *the living* (cf. Mt 22:32) is proof that the saints are very much alive. At any rate, how could Samuel appear to Saul (cf. 1 Sam 28:7-20), or Jeremiah appear to the Jews preparing for battle (cf. 2 Macc 15:12-16), or Moses and Elijah appear on the Mount of Transfiguration to talk with Jesus (cf. Mt 17:1-3), if the souls of the just do not live on after death? In Christ, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54).

Not only does their union with Christ ensure their eternal life, it also maintains their membership in the Body of Christ. God's "plan for the fulness of time" – which has already been realized in the lives of the saints – is "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10). In Christ, we are "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). By holding fast to the Head, the whole Body is joined and nourished and knit together (cf. Eph 2:20-21; 4:15-16; Col 2:18-19).

Members of the Body Intercede for One Another

To "intercede" for someone is to take that person's need or petition to God. When we ask a friend to

pray for us, we are asking for our friend's intercession. Christians ask people to pray for them all the time on the basis that the more people who are praying, the better.

This sort of intercession is a common practice in Scripture. For example, Moses often prayed on behalf of the people, that God would refrain from inflicting His just anger upon them (cf. Ex 32:11-14, 30-34; 34:9; Num 14:17-20; 21:7-9). Paul repeatedly implored the various churches to pray for him, his ministry, and those who were with him proclaiming the gospel (cf. Rom 15:30; Eph 6:19; Col 4:3-4; 1 Thes 5:25; 2 Thes 3:1; Heb 13:18). The instances of Paul and the other apostles and members of the Body of Christ praying for each other are even more numerous (e.g., Acts 8:15; 9:40; 28:8; 2 Cor 9:14; 13:9; Phil 1:9, 19; Col 1:3, 9; 2 Thes 1:11; Philem 1:22; 3 Jn 1:2).

This essential bond of love and unity that compels us to seek the prayer of others and to pray for one another really typifies what membership in the Body of Christ is all about. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men" (1 Tim 2:1; cf. Mt 5:44; Eph 6:18; Jas 5:16). Since, as we have seen, the saints in heaven are alive and members of the Body, they must also be seen as participating in this worthwhile act of intercession.

The Saints: Committed to Us and Our Needs

What we find in Scripture is that the saints in heaven do, in fact, play their part. First of all, far from being disinterested in human affairs now that they have achieved perfect unity with God, the saints show themselves to be keenly involved in and aware of what happens to the Body of Christ on earth.

Jesus said, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 18:10). Something about beholding the "Beatific Vision" (the vision of God in all His glory) makes the angels aware of the mistreatment of God's children.

Jesus also told us that there is joy among the angels in heaven over even one sinner who repents (cf. Lk 15:7, 10). We are "a spectacle" to them (1 Cor 4:9). The virtuous men and women who have gone before us make up a great "cloud of witnesses" that surrounds us as we run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1).

The Saints: First Responders

Because the saints are aware of us and our needs, the love that fills their hearts compels them to do something about it! In the Book of Job, we see an angel asking the Lord to deliver a man from death and return him to his youthful vigor (cf. 33:23-26). The Lord Himself told Jeremiah about how Moses and Samuel (who were long since dead) pleaded with Him on behalf of the people (cf. Jer 15:1). Zechariah spoke of an angel who lamented to the Lord that He had yet to show mercy to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah (cf. Zech 1:12). The martyrs in heaven cry out to God to judge and seek vengeance upon those who take the lives of God's faithful people (cf. Rev 6:9-11). In heaven, the angels and saints offer our prayers to God like incense (cf. Rev 5:8; 8:3-4).

What all of this proves is that *it is* in fact possible for us to communicate our needs to the saints, and for the saints to intercede for us, to take those needs to God. When we tell fellow Christians about a need that we have and ask them to take that need to God, this is essentially no different from what Catholics do when we pray to the saints, asking them to intercede. The saints, too, are our fellow Christians and greatly care about our needs.

The Prayers of the Righteous Are Powerful

James tells us in his letter, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (5:16). Or, to put it another way, "the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer" (1 Pet 3:12). No one is more righteous than a saint in heaven! We must also consider that the saints come from almost every walk of life imaginable. They took up every occupation, spoke every language, lived out every vocation, and hailed from every nation. They know what it's like to be us and to have the needs that are unique to our situation in life.

And so, because they are perfectly righteous and they understand the difficulties of this world for every man, *the saints can pray perfect prayers on our behalf*. Who wouldn't want that?! Once all the evidence is considered, how can we *not* avail ourselves of this power and blessing?

Cry Out to the Heavens

Are there examples of anyone doing this in the Bible? The example of David is illustrative here. He implored the angels, "Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word!" (Psalm 103:20; cf. 148:2). We can do likewise.



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