

SAINTS

Catholic Position It is biblical to ask the saints in heaven to pray for us, since all Christians, dead or alive, are part of the communion of saints. The one church of Christ consists of the "church militant", the "church suffering" and the "church triumphant". Recognized saints are imitated, honored and some of them canonized.

Protestant Position Though many of them profess to believe in the "communion of saints" in the Apostles' Creed, they do not believe in the intercessory prayers by saints.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The communion of saints refers to the bond of unity among all believers, both living and dead, who are committed followers of Christ. In Christ, we are made part of God's family (1 Tim 3:15), children of God (1 John 3:1), joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17), and partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). This family communion of saints is known to Catholics as the *Mystical Body of Christ*. We are joined in a supernatural union as members of Christ's own body, and thus as members of one another. Each of us participates in the divine nature of Christ himself.

Know the image of *the Vine and the Branches* (John 15:1-5). As branches are connected to Christ the vine, we are also connected to each other. Paul also emphasizes this unity in Christ's body in 1 Cor 12:12-27 (especially v25-27) and in Rom 12:4-16.

The saints are not dead. The saints in heaven are alive and with God: "*He is not God of the dead, but of the living*" (Mk 12:26-27). In Mark 9:4, Jesus is seen conversing with Elijah and Moses. The saints are free from all sin and enjoy the fullness of God's life-giving presence. They are actually more alive than we are.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Since death cannot separate Christians from Christ or from one another (Rom 8:35-39), we are still connected with the saints in heaven. In that union, we call for help and support from older brothers and sisters who have already won their crown of glory.

John describes the heavenly worship in these terms: "*The twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*" (Rev 5:8). The angels also play a role in bringing our prayers to God: "*The smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God*" (Rev 8:4). The martyrs underneath the heavenly altar cry out for earthly vindication (Rev 6:9-11), showing they are aware of, and concerned with, earthly affairs. In Heb12:1, we are told that those in heaven surrounds us as "*a cloud of witnesses*".

If intercession among members of the body of Christ on earth is "*good and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior*" (1 Tim 2:1-4), how would such behavior not also be pleasing to God in heaven?

ONE MEDIATOR?

Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus is our one mediator (1 Tim 2:5)? The flaw in this objection is that it proves too much. For if Catholics should not ask those for their prayers since we can go straight to Jesus, then no Christian on earth should ask a fellow believer for his prayers. On contrary, intercessory prayer is a great gift, for "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (Jas 5:16), and the angels and saints in heaven are inarguably righteous.

When we read 1 Tim 2:5 in context, it confirms that we share in Christ's mediation. In v1-7, Paul asks Christians to participate in Christ's unique mediation by offering prayers and intercessions for all men: "*this is good and pleasing to God.*" We are called to unite ourselves to the one mediator Christ, "*who gave himself as a ransom for all,*" by praying *for all men, through Christ.*

Because Christians share in the priesthood of Christ (1 Pet. 2:5,9), we share in a lesser and dependent way in His unique mediation, interceding for all men and serve as mediators between Christ and the world.

STATUES AND IMAGES

Catholics use statues and other images to call to mind the holy people they represent in devotions all year around. Catholics certainly do not worship statues, or anything created. The Catholic Church teaches that only God is to be worshipped: to worship anything created is to commit the serious sin of idolatry. In Ex 20:4-5, God prohibits the making of images *for the purpose of worshipping them.*

But God does not prohibit image-making altogether. In Ex 25:18-19, God commands Moses to make statues of angels (cherubim). In Num 21:8, God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent (seraph), which the Israelites had to look upon in order to be healed. The Jews also used many carved images in the Temple, including cherubim, oxen, lions, palm trees, and flowers (1 Kings 6 and 7).

The rejection of statues and other images in Church devotional life is a heresy known as "iconoclasm". It was first seen in Christianity in the 8th century when Emperor Leo, influenced by Islam, began attacking the use of statues and icons in the Church. In the Second Council of Nicea in 787 A.D., the Church condemned this heresy. It did not resurface in the Church until the Reformation.

READING

Making Saints (*Columbia, Nov 2000*)

Tara Lipinski : An Olympic Champion's Tale of Two Medals (*Be, Mar-Apr 2002*)

The Little Flower's Little Way (*Be, Mar-Apr 2002*)

Further Research

- Is prayer to the saints a type of necromancy (contacting the dead), which is condemned in Deut. 18:10-12?
- What are relics? Why are they collected? (Mk 5:25-34; Acts 19:11-12) What should be the correct attitude towards saints' relics?
- How does the Church identify saints? What are the requirements for someone to be declared a saint?
- Who are the patron saints? Why are they necessary?