

Hey everybody, it's me, Fr. Scott, your pastor. Welcome to week 4 of our Easter Small Group Series. This week we are focused on the saints, yet another great thing about being Catholic.

But I am sure that we all know that our Protestant brothers and sisters have some oppositions to the veneration of the saints. I thought we could pick out a few of these objections and help you know that Catholic response. We will find that there are clear answers to the misunderstandings that accompany resistance to our veneration of saints and that there is biblical justification for our veneration. If you want to dive into this topic a little more, there is a great article on Catholic Answers entitled *Common Objections to Praying to the Saints*.

So, there are four primary objections:

First of all, many protestants think that we worship Mary and the saints, when Christians should be worshipping God alone.

Secondly, they think that we are calling upon the spirits of the dead, which is forbidden in Scripture.

Thirdly, they believe that we look to the saints to be mediators with the Father for us, instead of allowing Jesus to be the one true mediator.

And finally, there is the claim that the Bible does not call us to honor saints or ask for their intercession.

So let's address these concerns.

First of all, we as Catholics do not worship Mary or the saints. We never have. Worship is for God and God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Throughout her history, in her various writings and teachings, like the Creed and the catechisms, the Church has taught that God alone deserves worship. Therefore, we are not to give worship to Mary or the saints. But we don't. We turn to Mary and the saints and ask them for prayers before the one true God, and we give them honor for their exemplary lives, but we do not worship them.

In particular, we do not worship images of Mary or the saints, or even images of Jesus, like on a crucifix. These represent those who we ask for prayers, but are not idols. And there is even justification in the Old Testament for making images, even though God forbade making images that are worshiped. God instructed the Israelites, in Exodus 25:18, to make images of cherubim for the Ark of the Covenant. He also called them, in Numbers 21:9, to make an image of bronze serpent to help those bitten by seraph serpents in the desert. So, God forbids worship of images, but there are instances when He even commands the creation of images, which represent something else important. Likewise, we create paintings and statues of saints and Jesus to represent them, but that does not mean that we are creating idols or worshipping these images.

Second, Catholics are not participating in Necromancy or superstition. We are not conjuring up the dead.

The saints that we venerate and ask for prayers are not dead beings with whom we are trying to communicate. They are fully alive because they are in Christ, who is life, as He says in John 11:25 and 14:6, and because they have eaten the Bread of Life, who tells us in John 6:35-56 that those who eat His Flesh and drink His Blood have eternal life.

Even more so, in the Book of Revelation, namely verses 4:10, 5:8, and 6:9-11, the saints are seen singing, playing instruments, worshipping the Lord, and praying for others. They are fully alive in heaven, and so, when we speak to them in prayers, we are not conjuring them from the dead, because they aren't dead.

Third, Catholics believe that Jesus is the one true Mediator between the Father and humanity. The Council of Chalcedon, the Council of Trent, and the First Vatican Council, amongst other Catholic proclamations, all reiterate that Jesus is the only Mediator. But, that does not mean that we cannot pray for each other. In fact, God calls for that in both the Old Testament and the New. In Genesis 20:7, God has King Abimelech ask for the intercession of Abraham: "he will pray for you, so you shall live." St. Paul tells the Romans to pray on his behalf in Romans 15:30-32. James, in the 16th and 17th verse of his 5th chapter, says to "pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

And just as we would ask someone living amongst us to pray for us, we can ask the saints, because they are still living members of the Body of Christ. And since the saints are part of the Body, and Jesus is the Head of that Body, the prayers of the Body do not compete with the mediation of the Head.

Finally, there is Biblical evidence for the intercession of Saints in Heaven. In Hebrews 12:22-24, the author speaks of approaching "Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and myriads of angels, and the assembly and church of the firstborn who have been enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and spirits of righteous ones who have been made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood which speaks better than that of Abel." The Christian is approaching both God and the angels and the "spirits of the righteous ones who have been made perfect", which refers to Christians perfected in Heaven, aka, the saints, both upper case S Saints and lower case s saints. Even more so, in Revelation 5:8, the elders are said to have "golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints". Also, in Revelation 8:3-4, an angel has "a golden censer, and many incenses were given to him, in order that he will give it with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar

before the throne. And the smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God.”

So, to recap, we do not worship Mary and the saints, and our images of them are not idols, but the images remind us of them as we ask for their intercessions. In doing so, we do not have to rouse them from death, because they are living members of the Body of Christ, and their prayers, united with the Head of Body, Jesus, are shown in Scripture to be lifted up before God the Father.

So, we can be confident in our relationship with the saints that they indeed pray for us and give us examples to follow. Like I said in my homily, they have run the race ahead of us, but they have also come back to support us to the finish line.

You can see the various Scripture quotes we used today here.

Now, let's look at this week's questions:

1. Who is your favorite saint and why?
2. Do you have a relationship with the saint you chose for your confirmation?
3. How have the saints helped you in your spiritual journey? Which saints are on your team?
4. If someone asked you why we have saints, what would you tell them?
5. If someone asked you why saints are important to you personally, what would be your answer?
6. What could you do to deepen your relationship with the saints?