SEARCH185

The Communion of Saints

Intercession, Relics and Statues

- What is a Saint vs. a saint?
    - o The Greek word for “saint” is hagiou and it means “holy one.”
    - o The Saints (with a capital “S”) are all the reasonable creatures, angel or human, whom God has admitted to the participation of His eternal glory. 1
    - o The “saints” (with a small “s”) are all Christians here on earth on that journey to their final destiny of eternal life with God – heaven.
- We are all called to be saints (holy). Paul said, “we should be holy (hagious) and blameless before him [Christ] (Eph 1:4; 1Pt 1:15-16).
    - o Holiness is living out our lives according to our design by God and our purpose in life. We are children of God called to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love each other as Christ loves us.
- The process of canonized Saints in the Catholic Church
    - o Canonization is the solemn declaration by the Pope that a deceased member of the faithful may be proposed as a model and intercessor to the Christian faithful and venerated as a saint on the basis of the fact that the person lived a life of heroic virtue or remained faithful to God through martyrdom (CCC 828; cf. 957, 958).2
    - o The process is as follows:
    1. Initiation of the investigation by the Bishop of a diocese or other group
    2. Investigation of writings and if a miracle is attested by the person’s intercession.
    3. Submit information to Congregation for the Cause of Saints
    4. After further investigation into the holiness of the person, he can be declared “Venerable.”
    5. Once a miracle from the deceased person is verified, they are declared “Blessed” (beatified) and may be venerated, but with restriction to a city, diocese, region, or religious family.
    6. After the 2nd confirmation of a miracle, the person is then canonized as a Saint to be venerated by the general public. This means that the person is verified to be in heaven and able to intercede for us.

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- There is an objection by non-Catholics in asking the Saints in heaven to pray on our behalf to the Lord (intercede). It stems from the notion that Christ is the sole mediator, therefore, we cannot be intercessors.
    - o First of all, it must be noted that the Catholic Church has never taught that we are to worship the Saints in heaven. She teaches that God alone is to be worshipped.
    - o When Catholics pray to the Saints in heaven, we are asking for their prayers on our behalf. We ask for them to intercede for us.
- What is the difference between intersession and mediation?

1 Thein, J. (1900). In Ecclesiastical Dictionary: Containing, in Concise Form, Information upon Ecclesiastical, Biblical, Archæological, and Historical Subjects (p. 622). New York; Cincinnati; Chicago: Benziger Brothers. 2 Catholic Church. (2000). Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Ed., p. 869). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

- o Mediator (L. “medius,” means “middle”): Mediate: to act between parties to effect an agreement, compromise, reconciliation, etc.3
- o Intercessor (L. cedere,: means “go between”): Intercede: to pleads on behalf of another, or endeavors to reconcile parties at variance; a mediator.4
- o Christ intercedes for us (Rom 8:34) and he is our “one mediator between God and man.” (1Tim 2:5)
- o We are also to intercede for one another (1Tim 2:1) because we are united to Christ and one another in what is called the Mystical Body of Christ.

I. Catholic Teaching

A. Catechism of the Catholic Church #946-962

1. The Communion of Saints is the fellowship of the members of the Church; #946
2. All members of the one body – that is Christ; #947
3. All Christians are connected through the Body of Christ; #953, 2 Cor 2:5, and 2 Cor 1:5-7, 1 Cor 12:26

B. Communion of Saints – Underlying Principles

1. Christians are members of the Body of Christ; Rom 12:4-5,
   a. Through baptism; Rom 6:3-4, Gal 3:27, 1 Cor 12:12-13, Col 2:12
2. Physical death does not separate us from the Body of Christ; Rom 8:38-39
3. There is only one Body of Christ, in Heaven and on Earth; Rev 6:9–11, Rom 12:5
4. We, the Church, are the Body of Christ; Eph 1:22-23, Col 1:18,24

C. Because of this union with Christ and one another, we can pray for one another here on earth and we can suffer for one another. Col 1:24

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II. Objections to Catholic Teaching on the Communion of Saints

A. In Deut 18:10-12, we are forbidden to “call up the dead” Catholic Response:

1. This is a misunderstanding of the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints; The quote from Deuteronomy is about the occult.
2. Catholics do not use mediums, spiritists, etc. to “call up the dead”
3. Saints in Heaven are “alive”; Mt 22:32 God is the God of the Living!
4. Jesus speaks to two “dead guys,” Elijah and Moses. (Mt 17:1-4) If Jesus can speak to the righteous that have gone before us, so can we.

B. Terminology: “Prayer” to Mary or “Prayer” to the Saints is worshipping them; we cannot ask for their prayer and intercession. Catholic Response:

1. For Catholics, all worship is prayer, but not all prayer is worship.
2. To “pray” means to ask (from old English – e.g., “I pray thee . . .”)

C. Saints in Heaven can't hear us or see us; therefore, we cannot pray to them

3 Dictionary.com 4 Ibid.

Catholic Response:

1. Saints in Heaven do not have the same limitations that we have on Earth: Rev 21:21;1
   Cor 13:12*; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Ptr 1:4; 1 Cor 2:9*
2. God reveals certain knowledge to angels and saints in Heaven; 1 Cor 2:10, Rev 6:9- 10, 1 Sam 28:8-19, Lk 16:19-31
3. Angels and saints, to some extent, know what's in a person's heart and mind; Luke 15:7-10, Mt 22:29-30, Heb 12:1

D. Prayer to Mary and the Saints is attributing God-like power (omnipotence) to them because they can't hear everyone at once. Catholic Response:

1. All prayer 1st goes through Christ; everything is through Him, with Him, and in Him; Mary and the Saints have no power of their own.
2. Analogy: Left hand sticking right hand with needle; all impulses 1st go through the brain, then to the extremities.
3. The Saints in heaven are not limited as we are on earth. A saint can see all things, everywhere yet not be omniscient or omnipresent like God
   a. Rev 5:13 "And I [John] heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying . . ."
   b. Lk 15:10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

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E. Why waste your time praying to the Saints when you can go straight to Jesus? Catholic Response:

1. We cannot go to the Saints without 1st going to Jesus (Head of the Body).
2. We believe that the prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16) see also 1Ptr 3:12, Heb 12:22-23, Job 42:7-10, Ex 17:8-13
3. According to other arguments, there are no righteous ones on earth (Rom 3:10). If none is righteous, who was James talking about in 5:16?
4. Saints in Heaven love us and want to pray for us; "Love never ends…" 1 Cor 13:8
5. It is no more a waste of time praying to the Saints in heaven, than praying for one another here on earth.

F. Biggest objection to Catholic teaching - 1Tim 2:5; Jesus' role as "sole mediator between God and man"

1. Catholics believe that Jesus is the "sole mediator between God and man." Only by Jesus' blood are we saved; but, as members of Jesus' Body, we can share in His role as mediator as He allows us to.
2. Moses, Abraham, Job are examples of mediation and intercession between God and man; praying for one another here on earth is an example of mediating and interceding between God and man. Num 21:7 ff
3. 1 Tim 2:5 is being misinterpreted. In 1 Tim 2:1-3 – We are to intercede for others.
4. Only one foundation, Jesus: 1 Cor 3:11. Yet, there are other foundations: Eph 2:19- 20, Rev 21:14

The biblical and historical understanding of our relationship with Christ is that he wants us to become like him. Through Jesus, we are called to enter into the very heart of the Trinity and become “partakers of the divine nature.” 2 Pet 1:4

This communion we share with Christ (and the Blessed Trinity) is what is called, “participatory theonomy.” We participate in, with and through Christ to save souls, enter into his passion and suffering, and redeem the world. But it is all done in Christ, we can’t do any good apart from Christ. (Jn 15:5)

God/Christ is . . .	**Others can be . . .**
The One Foundation – 1 Cor 3:11	Apostles are foundation – Eph 2:20
The Rock – Ps 62:2, 1 Cor 10:4	Peter is The Rock – Mt 16:18
The Shepherd – Jn 10:11	Peter is the shepherd – Jn 21:16
The One Mediator - 1Tim 2:5	We are mediators – 1Tim 2:1-2
The One Teacher – Mt 23:8	There are teachers in the Church – 1 Cor 12:28
The One Lord – Eph 4:4-5	Abraham as lord – 1Pt 3:6, Gen 24:18 (servant), Num 11:28 (Moses)
The One Judge – James 4:12	We are judges – 1Cor 6:2
The One Father – Mt 23:9	We are Fathers – Mt 3:9, 1 Cor 4:15
The High Priest – Heb 4:14; 5:10	We are priests – 1Pt 2:5, 9
The Prophet – Dt 18:18; Jn 6:14; Acts 3:22	There are prophets in the Church – 1 Cor 12:28
The Savior – Lk 2:11, Jn 4:42 . . .	“That I [Paul] might save some” – 1 Cor 9:22
The King of Kings – 1 Tim 6:15	The king of kings – Daniel 2:37 (Nebuchadnezzar)

5. More examples of intercessors/mediators: Mt 18:10 (guardian angel), Rev 5:8, Rev 8:3-4 (angels offer our prayers to God)

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Statues of Jesus, Saints and Angels

A. Command against graven images

a. God forbids making graven images for the purpose of idolatry.

> **Ex 20:3-6**, *23 "You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters . . ."*

b. God said concerning idols, "You shall not bow down to them." Deut. 5:9

B. The Catholic response: God commands graven images to be cast in the several instances.

a. God does not condemn images in general because elsewhere God commands that statues and other graven images be carved for religious purposes. The Catholic Church permits statues because they remind us of unseen things, but it condemns the idolatry of statue worship.

> **Num 21:9** *"Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole . . . " (Jn 3:14 "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert so must the Son of man be lifted up”)*

> **Ex 25:18-19** *"[The Lord said] make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make then, on the two ends of the mercy seat." More cherubim in Ex 26:1*

> **1 Kgs 6:23**,*27-29 "He made two cherubim of olive wood . . . and he overlaid them with gold. He carved all the walls of the Temple with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees with open flowers."*

> **1 Kgs 7:25**, *29, 36 "[The brazen sea] stood upon [statues of] 12 oxen, 3 facing north, 3 facing west, 3 facing south . . . ", "On the surfaces of its stays and on its panels, he carved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, as well as wreaths all around."*

Relics of Saints

The word relics comes from the Latin reliquiae, which is an object, notably part of the body or clothes, remaining as a memorial of a departed saint.

C. Since early Christian times, the remains of the holy Saints have been collected and honored.

a. In about 156 AD, describing the death of St. Polycarp the Smyrnaeans say, “after he had been burnt at the stake, we took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy, and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom." (Catholic Encyclopedia of 1917)

D. Miracles attributed to objects that belong to holy Saints has scriptural roots.

a. From the Old Testament

> **2 Kgs 13:20**,*21 "And Elisha died, and they buried him . . . And it came to pass, as they were burying a man . . . they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet."*

b. From Peter

> **Acts 5:15** *"The people carried the sick into the streets . . . so that when Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall on one of them."*

c. From Paul

> **Acts 19:11-12** *" And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought to the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."*

d. From Jesus

> **Mk 6:56** *"And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well.*

E. Idolatry condemned by the Catholic Church

a. The Second Council of Nicaea (787), which dealt largely with the question of the religious use of images and icons, said, “Christ our God, when he took for his bride his holy Catholic Church . . . promised he would guard her . . . To this gracious offer some people paid no attention; and they failed to distinguish the holy from the profane, asserting that the icons of our Lord and of his saints were no different from the wooden images of satanic idols."

b. The Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) taught that idolatry is committed "by worshipping idols and images as God, or believing that they possess any divinity or virtue entitling them to our worship, by praying to, or reposing confidence in them" (374).

c. "Idolatry is a perversion of man’s innate religious sense. An idolater is someone who ‘transfers his indestructible notion of God to anything other than God’" (CCC 2114).