



Do Catholics Worship Statues?

The Bible says to not make “graven images and worship them.” So why do Catholics have statues?

Church teaching is very clear about how Catholics view statues. Those who accuse Catholics of worshipping statues misunderstand the purpose of statues.

The First Commandment says not to worship false *idols*. In the Old Testament, we see the Israelites create a golden calf to worship instead of God. This is idolatry.

But Catholics don’t worship statues. We do, however, venerate them.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that, in the Old Testament, God allowed the Israelites to make certain images to use as symbols to help them point their minds towards heaven (CCC 2130). The *Catechism* also explains that we can *venerate* statues and images (CCC 2132). However, to *venerate* is not the same as to *worship*. To venerate means to pay respect, while worshipping is adoration that belongs to God alone.

Statues and other pieces of religious artwork are sacred symbols because they help us raise our minds to what they symbolize: God Incarnate and all His saints.

For instance, a crucifix is a common Catholic statue. We don’t pray to a crucifix; we pray to Christ, and the crucifix is a visual reminder of Christ’s sacrificial love for each of us. We human beings are body and soul, not just soul; we are physical creatures that benefit from physical representations of invisible realities.

The Church has a long history of using statues. In the early Church, most people couldn’t read or write. Also, before the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, very few people had access to books, including the Bible. Many were illiterate. As a result, many clergy used religious art to depict the story of salvation history for those who could not read.

Statues and religious artwork help us focus on holy realities, which is why we act reverently toward them. But Catholics don't pray *to* statues or worship them. The Church embraces statues and other sacred artwork as symbols of who we are praying to and the salvation that we are praying for.