



“One Mediator”:

Intercession of the Saints

The Year of St. Paul
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What is the role of the saints in the Catholic Faith? If Jesus is the one mediator between God and humanity, why do Catholics seek the intercession of the saints in heaven?

Very early in Christianity, a practice developed of seeking the intercession of Christians who lived faithfully, especially those who had given their lives as martyrs. Although there is no recorded record of any controversy regarding the practice in earliest Christianity, the Protestant Reformation began a long-standing, systematic objection to the practice, largely on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:5.

This outline will address three underlying aspects of Catholic teaching regarding the intercession of the saints:

1. Christ, as true God and true man, is the one mediator of the new covenant, who has reunited humanity with God.
2. God alone is worthy of adoration, and adoration offered to anyone or anything else is idolatry. It is proper, however, to offer veneration to those who have followed Christ faithfully.
3. Those who have died in Christ remain united to us as members of the body of Christ. The saints in heaven continuously intercede for us, and we may ask for their intercession.

Christ is the One Mediator

Both Catholics and Protestants affirm that humanity has been separated from God because of sin, and that Jesus Christ, as true God and true man, is the only one who is able to restore humanity to communion with God through his perfect sacrifice. Christ—not the saints themselves—is the source of all holiness.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 480: Jesus Christ is true God and true man, in the unity of his divine person; for this reason he is the one and only mediator between God and men.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 618: The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men".

God Alone is worthy of Adoration

Catholics and Protestants agree that only God is worthy of adoration, and we are to have no gods besides Him. In Scripture, both angels and Apostles rebuke any who attempt to give them the worship that is due to God alone.

Nonetheless, both angels and saints, because of their faithful service to God, deserve some level of **honor, with the understanding that all that they have done was accomplished by God's grace.** Early Christians distinguished between latria, the adoration given only to God, and dulia, the veneration given **to the saints.** **The honor given to those who follow Christ does not contradict God's will, but goes hand in hand with the praise, glory, and honor that God gives each of his faithful ones.** Because God cannot be outdone in generosity, we cannot offer to the saints more honor than He already has.

Exodus 20:1—3: Then God delivered all these commandments: "I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me. Tradition is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium.

Revelation 22:8—9: It is I, John, who heard and saw these things, and when I heard and saw them I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. But he said to me, "Don't! I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brothers the prophets and of those who keep the message of this book. Worship God."

The Martyrdom of Polycarp: “[W]e can never forsake Christ, nor adore any other, though we love the martyrs, as his disciples and imitators, for the great love they bore their king and master.... We afterwards took up the bones [of Polycarp], more precious than the richest jewels or gold, and deposited them decently in a place at which may God grant us to assemble with joy, to celebrate the birthday of the martyr [c. 150/160 AD].

See also Acts 14:15; Joshua 5:14; Genesis 18:2, 19:1, 37; 2 Kings 4:37; Luke 1:46—49; Revelation 3:8—9; Romans 2:10; 1 Peter 1:7; Romans 2:29; John 17:22

We Remain United to Those in Heaven

St. Paul teaches that all Jesus' disciples are members of one body and rely on Christ and on each other to properly function. Those who have entered into heaven remain part of the body of Christ, and we continue to be united to them and dependant upon them. Scripture indicates that those who have died remain at least in some way aware of what is happening on Earth and intercede for us. If those in heaven intercede for us, there is no reason not to ask for their intercession. Both Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church forbid necromancy—conjuring up the dead by means of a medium, often to seek information about the future—seeking the intercession of the saints is a practice clearly distinct from necromancy. God does not *need* the saints to pray for us on Earth in order to hear and answer our prayers, but nonetheless desires them to share in the joy of pouring out his goodness upon the rest of us. St. Paul repeatedly tells of the joys that he has in bringing others to Christ, and it would make sense for him to continue experiencing that joy in Heaven.

1 Corinthians 12:12—21: As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the

body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you."

Jeremiah 31:15—17: Thus says the LORD: In Ramah [the city where Rachel was buried] is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping! Rachel mourns her children, she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more. Thus says the LORD: Cease your cries of mourning, wipe the tears from your eyes. The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward, says the LORD, they shall return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future, says the LORD; your sons shall return to their own borders.

2 Maccabees 15:12—16: What he saw was this: Onias, the former high priest, a good and virtuous man, modest in appearance, gentle in manners, distinguished in speech, and trained from childhood in every virtuous practice, was praying with outstretched arms for the whole Jewish community. Then in the same way another man appeared, distinguished by his white hair and dignity, and with an air about him of extraordinary, majestic authority. Onias then said of him, "This is God's prophet Jeremiah, who loves his brethren and fervently prays for his people and their holy city." Stretching out his right hand, Jeremiah presented a gold sword to Judas. As he gave it to him he said, "Accept this holy sword as a gift from God; with it you shall crush your adversaries."

Catechism of the Catholic Church 956: *The intercession of the saints*. "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness... [T]hey do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped."

Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life. [St. Dominic]

I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth. [St. Therese of Lisieux]

See also: Matthew 2:18; Revelation 5:8, 8:3; Deuteronomy 18:11; Catechism of the Catholic Church 2116; 2 Corinthians 2:13; Philippians 2:2, 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:19