

Why do Catholics pray to saints instead of praying directly to God?

First, it is important to point out that Catholics do pray directly to God. Sometimes, however, they look to the community of believers to bring their prayers before God. In order to understand why Catholics pray to Saints it is necessary to understand what Catholics mean when they talk about the "Communion of Saints" and the "mystical Body of Christ". The word "communion" means unity. The term "Communion of Saints" refers to the unity of all Christians: the Church Militant on Earth, the Church Suffering in Purgatory, and the Church Triumphant in Heaven (Mark 12:26-27). In other words, all believers who are committed to following the teachings of Christ are part of one family. This one family of believers is also called the "mystical Body of Christ". The unity of all Christians can be found many places in the Bible. One example is John 15:5, where Christ says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Followers of Christ are one with Christ and are therefore part of one body.

This same idea is also found in Romans 12:5: "so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." As a community of believers, we need the help and support of others. We often ask a friend or loved one to pray for us during hard times. Catholics believe that this community of believers also extends to Saints, who are already united to God in heaven. Romans 8:38-39 shows us that death cannot separate us from Christ or, therefore, from other Christians who make up the one Body of Christ: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Because of this supernatural connection, Catholics ask Saints to pray for them and help them to follow in the steps of Jesus, just as they would ask a friend or relative to pray for them. When we ask people to pray for us or for some intention, we are asking for their intercession in petitioning God on our behalf. If we believe that the prayers of our friends and loved ones are heard by God, why would we doubt that those who have fought the good fight and preceded us into the perfection of heaven would not be able to intercede for us?

The Archangel Raphael told Tobit he was "one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One" (Tobit 12:15). In fact it was the intercession of the Archangel that led to Tobit and his daughter in law being healed (Tobit 12:14). If the saints in heaven are like the angels (Mark 12:25, Luke 20:36), surely their petitions are heard by God as well.

St. Paul tells us that "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God" (Romans 3:10-11). And St. James tell us that "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16).

If we are not righteous, shouldn't we seek the intercession of those who are? Praying to the Saints pleases God because it is humble. We are not relying on our own merits to ask for God's favor, but on the merits of those who have already proven themselves worthy of eternal life. By doing this, we enable the Saints in Heaven to glorify God by seeking his blessings on our behalf. If we really knew the gift we have of our family in heaven, we would never for a moment cease praying to them for everything we need. One of the requirements for a person to be formerly canonized as a Saint is to have two confirmed miracles attributed to his or her intercession. In other words, a Saint is not only someone who can intercede for us, but someone we know already has!

(Tobit 12:15; Matthew 18:10; Mark 12:25-27; Luke 20:34-38; John 15:1-8; Romans 3:10-11 with James 5:16; Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 5:8; Revelation 8:3-4)

Catholicism Frequently Asked Questions from the Transporter Information Services.

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