

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

by Fr. Antony

The Saints

Catholic saints are holy people and human people who lived extraordinary lives. Each saint the Church honors responded to God's invitation to use his or her unique gifts. God calls each one of us to be a saint. A saint in its broadest sense is one in a state of 'grace'; a person united to God and seeking to be perfected in love. The canonized saints are those who have attained, by responding to God's grace, the perfection of holiness.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The "communion of saints" has two meanings: communion in holy things (the spiritual goods we receive from Christ through sacraments) and communion of Holy people. The communion of saints can be divided into three stages: those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified and the blessed in heaven. All together form one church, a union of incomparable love and hope (**CCC 960-962**).

PRAYING TO THE SAINTS

It is the teaching of the Catholic Church that those in heaven can and do intercede for us. The church started this practice from early centuries and the church fathers also give witness to this. St. Paul tells us that there is only one mediator between God and man and that mediator is Christ. But this in no way means that we can not or should not ask our brothers and sisters to pray with us or for us. He in this same letter invites the faithful to pray for all for their salvation (**I Timothy 2:1-4**). This does not interfere in any way the mediator-ship of Christ. We can also ask in particular to those in heaven, who have already completed their sanctification. St James says that the prayer of a righteous man has greater power (**James 5: 16**).

It is clear from **Revelation 5:8** that the saints in heaven do actively intercede for us. It says that the incense which the elders hold in their hands are the prayers of the holy ones. It means the saints in heaven carry our prayers and offer them to God. It clearly shows that they are interceding for us.

SAINT WORSHIP?

One of the allegations against the Catholic Church is that the Catholics do worship the saints. But it is not true. The Catholics adore or worship God and God alone. But they do give due reverence to the saints and the term we use is 'venerate' or 'honor' and not adore.

The practice of honoring is entirely Biblical. Bible Commands us to honor certain people. “Honor your father and mother, that you may have life...”(**Ex. 20:12, Mt. 15:14**). God also commands the people of Israel to honor the religious leaders: “for the glorious adornment of your brother Aron you shall have sacred vestments made” (**Ex. 28: 2**). Scripture also says to honor the elders of the society (**Lev. 19:32**).

In the New Testament also we find the command to honor or give due reverence to those who deserve it (**Rom. 13:1-7**). Peter tells us to honor all men (**I Pet. 2:17**). Jesus himself promises blessings to those who honor the prophets and righteous man (**Mt. 10: 41**). Even in ordinary life people give due respect and honor to people who are dead and living. So, there is nothing wrong in giving due reverence to people who were righteous and exemplary in life.

Catholics also do not worship idols or statues. The statues, paintings, icons etc. reminds us of the persons whom it represents. When we kneel before a statue we are not kneeling before a statue but before God who is the creator and who gave this particular person as a good example for us.

Using statues for liturgical purposes is also biblical. In the book of Exodus God gives clear instructions to Moses how to make the Sanctuary, a dwelling place for God. God said to Moses “make two Cherubim of beaten gold for the two ends of the propitiatory...”(**Ex. 25: 18-20**). God also asks Moses to make a serpent and put in a pole to save people from snake bite (**Numbers 21: 8-9**).

Saints are role models for us and they give us good examples how we can imitate them in their relationship with God. Paul urges us to imitate him (**I Cor. 4:16-17**) and the letter to the Hebrews reminds us of imitating spiritual leaders (**Heb. 13:7**).