

Veneration of the Saints

Veneration of the saints is something distinctively Catholic. It is something we should understand well ourselves and be able to defend when questioned about it. Why do we honor saints? We honor saints because the Bible honors saints and God Himself has honored them. It is most natural that, if we believe in life after death, we believe also that our loved ones who have gone before us are somewhere where they can be in contact with Almighty God. The people who have gone before us have had problems similar to our own. They reflect various aspects of God's goodness, kindness and beauty. They are his friends. they are with Him in eternity.

Temporal intercession

If you know a friend who knows the boss from whom you want something, how natural it is to ask your friend to see if he can obtain it for you. We constantly do this day after day on earth. Why should we not continue to do it after a person has left this world? He is still interested in his interests on earth and he is still interested in us.

So why do we honor the saints?

- 1) They are God's friends.
- 2) They have added to life; some by their knowledge, some by their culture, all by teaching us how to live rightly.
- 3) They have achieved the highest distinction-union with God for all eternity.

Who are the Saints?

Who are the saints? The saints are those who by their good lives have reached heaven, whose union with God is ascertained by miracles and



their veneration is approved by the Church after adequate proof that they are with God. Those are the saints that can be venerated publicly. There is no reason why you cannot pray to your mother who has died or your father who has died, asking if they are in a position to do so, to obtain something from God for you.

What is the process by which one becomes a saint on the Calendar of the Church?

The individual whose fame for sanctity is well known is brought to the attention of the authorities of the Church and they entitle this person as "venerable." That means that he can be venerated in the community in which he lived. There is no assurance yet that he is in heaven, but this veneration, this praying to him or her is a process by which people find out whether or not this person has special influence with God.

Beatification: The person at this stage is called "Blessed". This means that he can be venerated publicly in the area in which he lived. For example, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. She is venerated now in the United States and Canada. It is hoped that someday we will have sufficient proof of the answers to prayers through her intercession that she is a saint.

Canonisation:

The individual is now called a "saint" and may be venerated publicly throughout the world, on all the altars of our Church.

We have the inflexible guarantee of the Church that this person is now in heaven and is truly with God and can ask God for favors for us.

You may say, "Why do we not go to God directly?" We are certainly free to do so whenever we wish. However, some people like to go to intermediaries who have something in common with them on earth and they feel that they will understand better what their problem is, and God will pay particular attention to them because the matter of concern falls into their "department." Saints are often made patrons of certain professions or certain activities on earth.

How do we venerate saints? By imitating their example, by praying and asking their intercession for us, by dedicating churches, schools, institutions, even cities, streets and islands to them, and by revering their statues and relics.

We must remember that we do not pray to the statue or relic, but we pray to the saint. the statue merely keeps our attention on the saint.

Veneration is not adoration

There is an immense difference, not only of degree but of kind, in the honor that we give to saints and the honor we give to God. We adore God acknowledging Him as the Supreme Being and we pray to Him, asking Him to answer our prayers directly.

On the other hand, we honor the saints, and in doing so we honor God who has made the saints what they are. We ask the saints to go to God for us, not to give us anything of themselves. They ask God for us.

Why do Catholics have statues, crucifixes, relics and pictures? It is a very human thing to do, is it not?

All of our cities have statues of heroes of our country to remind us

to imitate their national virtues, their patriotism, their love of country, etc.

You have pictures of your loved ones in your home, and possibly in your wallet. Why? Because you love them, you love to see them, to be reminded of them. It is for similar reasons that we have pictures of the saints in our homes and in our churches.

An authentic relic has to have documents with it saying that this is actually a relic of a saint. It may be a part of the body or the whole body of the saint, a first class relic.

A second class relic would be the instruments of torture or clothes - or things used by the saint. Again, it is a very human kind of thing to bring ourselves closer to the saint.

When I went to Ars, I used the chalice of the great St. John Vianney and wore his vestments. It was a privilege, I thought, to use the things that so holy a priest used.

The bodies of saints, of course, were temples of the Holy Spirit on earth and so we honor these bodies in death as we honor the bodies of relatives and friends by reverently burying them. ■

By most rev.

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