

## Devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints

People who are not Catholics sometimes wonder about Catholics' devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints. However being in touch with Mary and the saints is one of the distinguishing elements of Catholic culture. It's an important part of being a practicing Catholic. There are several fundamental insights behind Catholic devotion to the saints.

First of all, we are dealing with a kind of family matter here. Being Catholic means being in a family, and being in a family means having relatives. Our relatives as members of the Church include not only our



brother Jesus, but all his brothers and sisters as well. Most of these brothers and sisters are pretty much the same as we are, ordinary people without anything special to recommend them — except their membership in the family. Others

are quite special, the really successful members of the family to whom we others look with particular affection and regard. These are the ones we call the saints. Practicing Catholics are generally attentive to their relatives.

Implicit in this family attentiveness is the conviction that saints are not just figures from history which we look back on with admiration and gratitude. They are still alive with and in the risen Lord in heaven. Their life continues, although in a form that is different from their earthly existence. And because our life of faith is also a sharing in the life of the risen Christ, we are in contact with the Lord's saints in and through him.

But that's not all. Just as we are in touch with the saints through the life of Jesus that we share, so they are in touch with us. They



love us in him and care for us in him. They don't look down on us from heaven as detached spectators of what's going on here in our lives, but as our brothers and sisters who are looking out for those they love. Just as the life and love of Jesus is expressed and extended on earth by those who live in faith, so also the life and love of Jesus is expressed and extended from heaven by those who live in glory. Just as the family of the Lord is not limited by place, but extends throughout the earth, so also the family of the Lord is not limited by time and by the presence of its members in earthly life.

Catholic devotion to Mary and the other saints and Catholic confidence in the intercession and help of the saints for us are ways in which we express our family awareness and loyalty. Being Catholic is never a matter of just me and Jesus. It's always we and Jesus, and the "we" includes Mary, the mother of

God, and all the other saints. We're all part of the same family. We somehow all belong together.

Catholics do not offer the same kind of reverence to the saints that they offer to God. The saints can never take the place of Jesus, precisely because it is the life of Jesus that constitutes the common



element that keeps the family together. Without him there would be no family. But there is a family, his family of faith and glory, and when Catholics pay their respects to Mary and the saints, they are offering their respect also to the one in whom the family has its origin.

Practicing Catholics are comfortable in the company of the saints. It's one of the ways they express their attachment to the family.

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