

Prayers To The Dead?

- I. Roman Catholicism holds that living persons can secure the help of departed saints in heaven to obtain favor of God. This is referred to in general as *the intercession of saints* (saints in heaven can intercede for others). It is fleshed out as:
 - A. *The invocation of saints* (the practice of persons requesting saints in heaven to intercede for them). This belief is also held by the Eastern Orthodox Church, Assyrian Church of the East, Oriental Orthodox Churches, et. al.
 - B. *The comprecation of saints* (the practice whereby persons ask God for a share of the prayers offered by saints in heaven).
- II. Here are some official Catholic statements regarding prayers to / invocation of dead saints.
 - A. "...instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to the intercession and invocation of the saints...it is good and beneficial suppliantly to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance and support in order to obtain favors from God...that those who maintain that veneration and honor are not due to the relics of the saints, or that these and other memorials are honored by the faithful without profit, and that the places dedicated to the memory of the saints for the purpose of obtaining their aid are visited in vain, are to be utterly condemned, as the Church has already long since condemned and now again condemns them." (Schroeder, H.J., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, p. 215 [From the 25th Session of Trent])
 - B. Prayers "...to the saints and martyrs collectively, or to some one of them in particular" are recommended. (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, pp. 653, 655, art. Prayers for the dead)
 - C. "...pray, first to Saint Mary, and the holy apostles, and the holy martyrs, and all God's saints...to consider them as friends and protectors, and to implore their aid in the hour of distress, with the hope that God would grant to the patron what he might otherwise refuse to the supplicant." (*Ibid*, vol. 4, p. 173, art. Communion of Saints)
 - D. See also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church @ 956* for the same as above.
- III. Here are some other official Catholic statements which, as is typical, admit to some "issues" with this doctrine.
 - A. "The chief objections raised against the intercession and invocation of the saints are that these doctrines are opposed to the faith and trust we should have in God alone...and that they cannot be proved from Scriptures..." (*Ibid*, vol. 8, p. 70, art. Intercession)
 - B. "And I do not undertake to prove to you that when we pray before a picture or a statue of a saint, that that saint infallibly hears or knows what we are saying, or even what we are doing." (*Plain Facts*, p. 170)
 - C. Pagan religions were rife with regional, seasonal, calendrical, vocational gods, etc., and legends of their supposed exploits which were transferred to the "saints." They "...repeat the conceptions found in the pre-Christian religious tales...The legend is not Christian, only Christianized...In many cases it has obviously the same origin as the myth...Antiquity traced back sources, whose natural elements it did not understand, to the heroes; such was also the case with many legends of the saints...It became easy to transfer to the Christian martyrs the conceptions which the ancients held concerning their heroes. This transference was promoted by the numerous cases in which Christian saints became the successors of local deities, and Christian worship supplanted the ancient local worship. This explains the great number of similarities between gods and saints." (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, pp. 130, 131, art. Legends)

- IV. Keep in mind that in Catholicism, lip-service is given to the authority of Scripture (even to the point of declaring it the highest authority), but the reality is that Tradition and Magisterium are also supreme authorities (which often contradict and overrule the Scripture).
- A. A dedicated Catholic is conscience-bound to not counter the decisions and decrees of Popes and Councils, even though the plain statements and reasonings of the Scripture manifestly contradict them. To counter the system is to incur condemnation, as per the example above from the Council of Trent.
 - B. To Catholicism, Scripture is useful to a degree, but also problematic and wrested to support the system, not rule the system.
 - C. With these things in mind, it may or may not be a point of reflection or conviction to note to a Catholic the following:
 1. Scripture is void of examples of the living invoking the spirits of dead saints in any positive construction. We never read of the apostles praying to the spirit of John the Baptist to score points with God, nor do we ever read of apostles or believers praying to the martyred Stephen or James (**ACT 7:56-60; 12:1-2**) to present their petitions to the resurrected Christ.
 2. The example of Saul trying to gain special access to God through dead Samuel hardly stands as a positive example of appealing to God through a dead saint. **1SAM 28:11-15.**
 3. Scripture teaches that the perfection of saints in knowledge and power does not happen until Resurrection Day (**1CO 13:12; PHIL 3:20-21**). If the multiplied millions of living Catholics now are praying to *approved* saints in heaven for influence, how do those saints handle the workload without attributing to them supernatural traits such as God Himself has?
 4. There is not even an example of someone positively invoking Enoch or Elijah (bodily translated saints) for intercessory helps, and the Jews errantly thought Jesus was calling to Elijah. **MAT 27:46-47.**
 5. The Apocrypha, not Scripture, supports the intercession of dead saints in **2MAC 15:14-17.**
- V. The following are offered as scriptural support for the invocation of the saints.
- A. **JER 15:1.** It is supposed that God opened heaven's door for Moses and Samuel.
 1. This is rather an obvious hyperbole for effect, a "What if...?" c/w **EZE 14:14.**
 2. No prayer by anyone was going to alter God's decree against Judah. **JER 7:16; 14:11.**
 3. There was an indifference toward the apostles on the part of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were occupied with discussion with Jesus concerning His coming death. **LUK 9:29-35.**
 4. Building a case for invoking the help of dead saints from a scenario which clearly states that God wouldn't even hear them is rather strange.
 - B. **LUK 16:19-31.** It is supposed that this supports the notion of the living appealing to the dead saint, Abraham, for help.
 1. All involved in this conversation were dead. This was a dialogue beyond the veil.
 2. Even at that, the petition was denied.
 3. The spirits of the just in heaven, like Abraham, are virtually ignorant of us. **ISA 63:15-16.**
 4. Using an example of a dead, damned sinner in hell whose appeal to a saint in heaven is denied is a rather strange model for a living saint on earth.
 5. The account shows that it is best for the living to impress God according to what

Moses and the prophets spoke when they were yet alive: the scriptures.

- C. **REV 5:8.** Because the twenty-four elders in glory have golden vials full of the prayers of saints, it is supposed that they mediate intercessions to God on behalf of the living on earth.
1. Catholicism generally holds that sainthood is reserved for those already in heaven by the papal process of beatification, then canonization. Therefore, since these are the *prayers of saints*, what's to say that they are not the prayers of those already in heaven, such as the martyrs of **REV 6:9-10**?
 2. The language of **REV 5:8** would also include the four beasts as having the vials. Should the living also be praying to the four beasts of **REV 4:6-9**? "Oh, beast, hear my prayer..."
 3. They all also have harps. Should Catholics abandon St. Cecilia Day (Nov. 22), whom they have designated the presiding saint of musicians, and seek the help of the beasts and elders directly to make the playing of their instruments more persuasive of God?
 4. **REV 5:8** says nothing of the beasts or elders offering their own prayers in helpful response to the prayers of the living on earth, nor does it state that people prayed to them, only that they have the "...golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints." They are more likely the humble heavenly version of "...hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation..." (**JOS 9:27**) who don't even place much stock in their own crowns, per **REV 4:10-11**.
- D. **REV 8:3.** Sometimes alluded to in support of the invocation of saints, this verse still says nothing about the redeemed heavenly crowd petitioning God at the request, and on the behalf of, the living on earth.
1. This rather describes an angel Who offers incense "...with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."
 2. This angel ministers as a priest whose office it was to offer incense to God. **EXO 30:7-8; NUM 16:40; 2CH 26:18.**
 3. Jesus Christ is the ONE mediator between God and men, the ONE by Whom our prayers are accepted of God. **1TI 2:5; EPH 2:18; 1PE 2:5.**
 4. Therefore, this angel is Jesus Christ, Who is called the messenger (angel) of the covenant. **MAL 3:1.**
 5. All of our prayers should be made directly through Jesus Christ:
 - a. as the Only access to God. **JOH 14:6.**
 - b. in His name only. **JOH 14:14; 16:23.**
 - c. according to His will (**1JO 5:14**), not Rome's.
 - d. crying "Father" directly. **MAT 6:9; ROM 8:15.**
 - e. trusting His Spirit to overwrite our infirmities. **ROM 8:26-27.**
 - f. because He is Man Alive. **1TI 4:10; REV 1:18.**
- VI. The living saints should pray for the living, not the dead for the living nor the living to the dead. **JAM 5:14-16.**
- A. Necromancers (One who practises necromancy; one who claims to carry on communication with the dead) are forbidden by both testaments. **DEU 18:10-11; GAL 5:19-21.**
- B. The notion of "the living to the dead" was not meant to be a proposition but preposterous. **ISA 8:19-20.**
- VII. It is better to honor the Jesus Who prayed for Peter (**LUK 22:31-32**) than a Jesus who is fashioned after the image of another Peter and who is moved by a dead Peter.