

Many non-Catholics and even some Catholics have a problem with the Catholic tradition of praying to the angels and saints, and in particular, Mary. Many people feel that this is "unbiblical" and so it is not necessary. Some even consider it to be idolatry—a direct contradiction to the first commandment. Let's take a closer look at this belief.

It is important to understand that something does not have to be spelled out explicitly in the Bible in order for it to be true. Contrary to popular fundamentalist belief, the Bible is not "all you need." By saying this, however, I am not devaluing it in any way. Catholics recognize the Bible as being the sacred and infallible Word of God. Without diminishing the importance of the Bible, Catholics also recognize the Sacred Tradition (not to be confused with "tradition" of men) of the Church which was passed on by word of mouth. If you are familiar with the history of the Bible, then you know that the sacred canon of scripture was not officially agreed upon until around the early 400s. This canon of scripture was accepted by Christians until Martin Luther and the reformers decided to start throwing stuff out. So what did Christians do for the first 400 years or so, before they had the "official" Bible? The answer, not surprisingly, is in the Bible itself:

Take as a model of sound teaching what you have heard me say, in faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (2 Tim 1:13-14).

The things which you have heard through me through many witnesses you must hand on to trustworthy men who will be able to teach others (2 Tim 2:2).

Therefore, brothers, stand firm. Hold fast to the traditions you received from us, either by our word or by letter (2 Thess 2:15).

We command you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to avoid any brother who wanders from the straight path and does not follow the tradition you received from us (2 Thess 3:6).

The above verses do not in any way diminish the importance of Holy Scripture. It is unfortunate that Protestants have "protested" and ultimately rejected this Sacred Tradition. A lot of what we know about our Blessed Mother (and many other things) was handed to us through Sacred Tradition. Of course, any discussion of the "Bible alone" theory would be incomplete if we did not mention that "There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them." (John 21:25). This clearly shows that something is not automatically made false or wrong if it doesn't appear in the Bible. Now let's look at the claim that praying to Mary or the saints and angels is unbiblical.

Those who think that Catholics are worshipping Mary by praying to her and thus committing idolatry have it all wrong.

Speaking for myself (and I know that any orthodox Catholic would agree), I know that God is the creator of everything. I know that He alone is God. I know that He created Mary, and that she was human just like you and me. I know that she is not divine. I do not think she is God, and I do not worship her or consider her a goddess. What's more, God knows my heart. He knows that I worship Him alone, and that I do not worship any of His creation. Some may still insist that I am worshipping Mary, but in doing so they are arrogantly assuming that they can read my heart and mind and claim that I really believe something other than what I just declared. Perhaps it is the word "pray" that is giving them trouble. Many seem to think that by praying to someone that, by some built-in definition of the word "pray," we are at the same time worshipping that person. In the general sense, the word "pray" means to communicate with God. "Pray" can also mean to ask imploringly or to beseech. Catholics often ask or beseech created beings, such as the saints (including Mary) and the angels, to pray for us and obtain God's graces or mercy. When we pray to the saints and angels, we are communicating with them—not worshipping them. Perhaps we could use a different word such as "talk," "chat," or "converse" if that would make some people feel better.

Some may ask, "Well, if that's really true, then you shouldn't be talking to the dead—that's occultism." The Bible is replete with passages that admonish us not to communicate with the dead. It should be obvious, however, that the dead in Christ are not truly dead. "Moses in the

passage about the bush showed that the dead rise again when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. All are alive for him" (Luke 20:37-38). Some may ask, "But can those people hear us? How do we know that the saints in heaven can hear us?" To answer this, read all of Hebrews, chapter 11. Then look at the first verse of chapter 12: "Therefore, since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of *witnesses*..." A witness is someone who sees or hears something happen. Also, in the book of Revelation we find several instances where either angels or the "elders" have bowls of incense mixed with the prayers of God's faithful. In a clear example of intercessory prayer, they present the prayers to the altar of God (Rev 5:8, 8:3-5). Another great example of intercessory prayer is in the book of Tobit:

I can now tell you that when you, Tobit, and Sarah prayed, it was I who presented and read the record of your prayer before the Glory of the Lord, and I did the same thing when you used to bury the dead...I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who enter and serve before the Glory of the Lord (Tobit 12: 12-15).

Unfortunately, the book of Tobit was deleted from the Protestant Bible. You'll have to get a Catholic Bible to read it!

So the Bible shows us that people who have died in Christ are not really dead—and isn't that what all Christians hope for?

To spend eternity alive with Christ? The Bible shows us that these people who have left this life (but are not really dead) are also witnesses to our actions here on earth. And doesn't that make sense? Don't you think that if you died and went to heaven, that you would be concerned about the well being of your friends and loved ones still in this world? If you saw that someone you loved was in trouble, wouldn't you ask God to help them out? The Bible also shows that the saints and angels in some way present our prayers to the Lord. The Bible says that "The fervent petition of a holy man is powerful indeed" (James 5:16). Therefore, doesn't it make sense to seek out holy people to pray for us? Is there anyone who can dispute that Mary is the most perfect of all God's creatures? She is the holiest and purest person who ever walked the earth, save Jesus Christ himself. Don't you think that God is just a little bit more likely to listen to Mary than sinners, say, like you and me? This brings me to every Fundamentalist's favorite question concerning the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints:

HOW MANY MEDIATORS DO WE HAVE? THE BIBLE SAYS THERE IS ONLY ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN, THE MAN CHRIST JESUS.

Many Protestants think that 1 Timothy 2:5 is the single most damning quote to the Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Unfortunately, this is a case of citing scripture out of context. Actually, if you just back up about four verses to the beginning of the chapter, the case is made *supporting* the Catholic position. In

1 Timothy 2:1, St. Paul urges that "petitions, prayers, *intercessions*, and thanksgiving be offered for all men..." and he goes on to say in verse 3: "Prayer of this kind is good, and God our savior is pleased with it, for he wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth." What St. Paul is doing is urging all Christians to pray for *other* people—Christian or not. God is happy when we intercede on the behalf of others with petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving. Why? Because our prayers can help someone who is hopelessly lost, and God wants everyone to be saved and to know the truth. Interestingly, if you look up the word "intercede" in a thesaurus, guess what word is included in the list of synonyms? "Mediate." So, in 1 Timothy 2:1, Paul is telling all Christians to be mediators on behalf of other people. So to answer the original question, we have as many mediators as we have Christians, and Mary is a really good one. The way that Christ mediates for us is different than the way that we mediate or intercede for each other. It has to be a different type of mediation than what is described in verse 1 or else St. Paul is contradicting himself. When we consider that Jesus is the one mediator between God and man, remember that Mary is included in the party described as "man" (I know this irritates the heck out of the feminists, but that's just the way it is). She needs Jesus to mediate to God on her behalf just the way we all do.

So what's all of this have to do with praying to Mary? Well, the Bible shows that we should pray for each other, and likewise that we should convince others to

pray for others (this includes convincing others to pray for us). Since the Bible shows that Mary, the saints and the angels are all alive and well in heaven, and also that they can hear us, and that they offer our prayers to God, then it makes just as much sense to ask Mary, the saints and the angels to pray for us as it does to ask your pastor, or your mother, or a DJ at a Christian radio station. Actually, it makes more sense because all of those in heaven are now spotless and pure—washed clean by the Precious Blood of Christ. Of course, by the grace of God (in this case, a very special mediation by our Lord Jesus Christ on Mary's behalf), Mary was conceived without sin to begin with, which makes her prayers especially powerful.

Those who reject the doctrine of the Communion of Saints are forfeiting an immensely power spiritual help that could make the difference between salvation and damnation. This is one of many reasons that satan has divided the Church and led people away from the truth. Don't let it happen to you! My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will open the hearts and minds of all people who have trouble with this doctrine, so that they may not miss out on the powerful help of Mary, the saints and angels.

## The Bible and the Communion of Saints

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