

after her death the grace of God touched Basilides' heart, and he professed himself a Christian. His comrades at first imagined that he was jesting. But when he persevered in the confession of the Faith, he was brought before the judge, who sentenced him to be beheaded next day. Taken to prison, he was baptized, and at the appointed time, executed.

What else but the intercession of the saint whom he had befriended obtained for this heathen the grace of the Faith and martyrdom? Convinced of the power of the intercession of the saints, Origen writes: "I will fall on my knees, and because I am unworthy to pray to God on account of my sins, I will invoke all the saints to come to my aid. O ye saints of God, I, filled with sadness, sighing and weeping, implore you; intercede for me, a miserable sinner, with the Lord of mercies!"

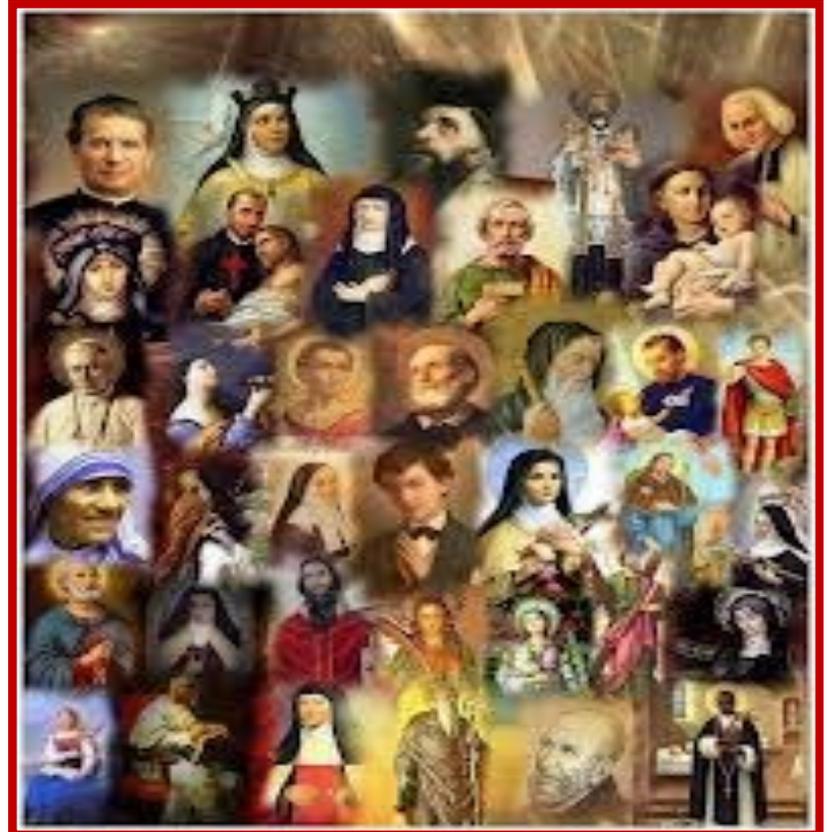


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The Veneration and Invocation of Saints, and the Efficacy of Prayer Part I

CHAPTER II of IV

Efficacy of the Intercession of the Saints



"Remember your prelates who have spoken the word of God to you;
whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation"
(*Heb. xiii. 7*).

"Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me, as I am also of Christ"
(*1 Cor. iv. 16*).

Efficacy of the Intercession of the Saints

NOTHING is more consoling and comforting than the assurance that in the saints of heaven we have powerful protectors and advocates with God. Through their intercession they obtain for us from Him the grace to lead a virtuous life and to gain heaven.

However, is there any reasonable doubt that the saints are able to render us such a service? In virtue of the communion of saints, which comprises the Church militant on earth, the Church suffering in purgatory, and the Church triumphant in heaven, all members of the Church are members of one body, whose head is Christ. Hence the saints are united with us in spirit, though separated from us in body. United with Christ, they are imbued with a superior knowledge, and through Him, the All-Knowing, they know everything that concerns us, and for which we have recourse to them in prayer.

Our confidence in the intercessory power of the saints is founded on their relation to God and to us. As friends of God they have influence with Him now, even more than during their sojourn on earth, because their intercessory power is one of their glorious prerogatives in heaven. Their love of God and their charity for their fellow-men, and the zeal for the salvation of souls resulting therefrom, together with their conformity with Christ, induces them to use their influence readily in our favor. Because God dispenses His gifts according to His own adorable will, it may please Him to grant a certain favor at the particular intercession of a certain saint; hence it is not superstition to invoke His aid in such cases. Moreover, we justly place our confidence in saints whom we have selected to be our special patrons, or who were given us as such by ecclesiastical authority.

By the intercession of the saints the mediatorship of Christ is not set aside or restricted. The power of intercession, the intercession itself, and its invocation are an effect of the grace of Christ; therefore He remains our only mediator. God remains Our Lord and Father, although men share in His lordship and paternity; for all power and authority comes from God, who is pleased to operate in His creatures through other creatures. Hence, only a dependent mediatorship can be ascribed to the saints. Whoever admits that the living can pray for each other can not denounce the intercession of the saints as an usurpation of the mediatorship of Christ. The saints are not the authors and dispensers of grace and heavenly gifts, but they are able to obtain them for us from God.

The saints, moreover, do not only pray for mankind in general, but for their clients in particular. As co-reigners with Christ, the denizens of heaven have knowledge of the conditions and events of His kingdom; hence the saints may pray for us individually; therefore it is permissible and profitable for us to invoke them. It is obvious that the knowledge of individual occurrences does not mar the bliss of the saints. How they gain this knowledge is not clear to the spiritual authors; but most of them incline to the view that they attain it by direct divine mediation. God reveals our condition and our invocation to the saints.

Can we doubt the willingness of the saints to aid us by their intercession? According to St. Paul, charity is the greatest of all virtues. If, then, the saints, whilst on earth loved their fellow-men, cared for and prayed for them, how much more will they do so now, when their charity is perfected? They, too, were pilgrims on earth, who had to suffer the adversities and miseries of life and therefore know by experience how sorely in need of divine assistance we poor mortals are. Persons who have themselves experienced trials have more compassion for the adversities of others.

Therefore it is certain that the saints have compassion on us, that they wish our prayers to be heard and bring them before the throne of God. "The saints," says St. Augustine, "being secure of their eternal welfare, are intent upon ours." Holy Scripture establishes this beyond doubt, saying that the saints bring the prayers of the faithful before the throne of God (*Apoc. v. 8*).

Or is there any one that doubts the *efficacy* of the saints' prayer with God? At any rate, we must concede that their prayer is more effectual than ours; for they are confirmed in justice, and therefore friends and favorites of God, whilst we are sinners, of whom Holy Scripture says, "The Lord is far from the wicked, and He will hear the prayers of the just" (*Prov. xv. 29*). On this subject, let us hear St. Basil in his panegyric on the Forty Martyrs: "You often wanted to find an intercessor: here you have forty who intercede unanimously for you. Are you in distress? Have recourse to the holy martyrs. Rejoicing, do the same. The former that you may find relief, the latter that you may continue to prosper. These saints hear the mother praying for her children, the wife invoking aid for her sick or absent husband. O brave and victorious band, protectors of mankind, generous intercessors when invoked, be our advocates with God!"

There is no doubt, then, that during our earthly pilgrimage the saints are our intercessors with God. True, we know that there is One who guides our destinies and whose providence watches over all; but who would not choose, also, to have a friend already abiding with God, sharing His bliss and confirmed for ever in His grace, and who therefore is in a position to aid us, and certainly will do so if we invoke Him?

The following is an example illustrating the power of the saints' intercession with God:

Basilides was one of the guards that led St. Potamiana to a martyr's death. Whilst the rest of the soldiers and the crowd of spectators insulted the holy virgin, he treated her with great respect and protected her from the assaults of the rabble. The martyr thanked him for his kindness, and promised to pray for him when she came into God's presence. A few days