**Veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints**

Do you have family members or friends who have left the Catholic Church for another denomination or for that matter, no denomination at all? In my years as a Catholic apologist one of the arguments I hear quite often is that when Catholic pray to Mary and the saints that they are praying to dead people and this is condemned. Besides, those in Heaven can’t hear our prayers anyway, and what are all these repetitious prayers Catholics say (like the Rosary) which is condemned in Matthew 6:7?

Well, let’s get busy answering these objections to clear up any misunderstandings.

Let’s begin with St. Matthew’s Gospel 22:31-32. “And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

The holy people (Saints) who have gone before us are more alive now than we are. As this verse says, God is the God of the living not the dead and it makes it clear in naming Abraham, Isaac & Jacob as being alive. Deuteronomy 18:10-11 forbids the conjuring of spirits from the dark underworld (sheol) in order to speak with them (i.e. séance). This is not what the Catholic Church teaches or practices. We are asking fellow members of the Body of Christ who have achieved the heavenly goal to pray for us. We have to remember that the Mystical Body of Christ extends beyond the person in the pew to the Church Triumphant in heaven and the Church Suffering in Purgatory. All three (the Church on earth, the Church in Heaven and the Church in Purgatory) are the One Mystical Body of Christ!

Can those in Heaven hear our prayers? St. Mark teaches so. He says in 12:26-27, “And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham ….

So the Saints in Heaven are more alive and aware of what’s going on than we are. They’re not separated from the Body of Christ as I mentioned above. They are actually more united to it and to us. Their love for us is now unblemished and through the love of God, they desire God’s blessing for us. Asking them to pray for us is similar to asking a friend to pray for us. It doesn’t take away from the mediation of Christ that is still required but contributes to our prayers to Christ on our behalf. It even mentions the prayers of the Saints in Revelation 5:8. The prayers of the Saints are being offered to God. What petitions would Saints in Heaven have to offer to God if it weren’t for the petitions we give them? Those in Heaven have no needs. If the Saints in Heaven couldn’t hear our prayers then this would imply that they are separated or cutoff from the Body of Christ. In fact, they are more alive than we are (Mk 12:26-27) and are more closely united to Christ than we are.

What about repetitious prayer? Let’s see what St. Matthew has to say. In Matthew 26:24 we read, “So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words...”

It is true that scripture condemns *vain* repetitious prayer. The rosary, though it contains many of the same prayers, is not in vain just as Jesus’ prayers identified in this verse were not in vain. If the mind and heart are upon God, who can say these prayers are in vain? Most people who attack the rosary don’t understand it is a prayer of contemplation upon the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ and His Mother. The frequent meditation upon these mysteries can only draw one closer to Christ. Try it and see!

Look at Revelation 4:8. “…and day and night they never cease to sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” Here we have angels in Heaven praising God day and night saying the same thing over and over. If this were vain repetitious prayer, God would not allow it in Heaven. God didn’t condemn repetitious prayer; only *vain* repetitious prayers. If prayers are said with heartfelt adoration and praise for God, they are not in vain. Who is to judge whether someone is praying in vain? Do we know their hearts? Only God can read our hearts. Repetition is not the problem; vain repetition is. If Christ did not intend for there to be any contact at all between those here on earth and those in heaven, then we have to explain what we see in Matthew 17. It is where Christ Himself appears on Mt. Tabor (Transfiguration) with two dead people, Moses and Elijah. So one could say, “Why would Christ violate his own law by bringing into contact with one another people who are alive on earth and people alive in heaven if this is forbidden. What point would that serve? It would just confuse things.

So the whole issue of Mary and the Saints and honoring them is built upon the framework of these four principles:

1. The Church is the Body of Christ
2. There is only one Body
3. We are not separated by death
4. All of the members of the Body (Church Triumphant in Heaven, Church Suffering in Purgatory and Church Militant on earth)) are bound to each other by charity.

God bless. Phillip Bellini, DRE