The Saints

The Saints in Paradise are the triumphant members of the same one church, which is the one Body of Jesus Christ, in which we are the striving members. The triumphant members become invisible members because of the death of their bodies, and then we, the striving, are the visible ones. The death of their bodies does not sever the bond of mutual love between them and us; on the contrary, it increases in depth and strength. Their prayers for the salvation of the entire world never cease. They pray for us, and we venerate them as they are our holy and dear friends.

Saints’ Intercessions

We have only one intercessor for propitiation, that is Our Savior Jesus Christ, as St. John says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1John 2:1). The Apostle Paul also says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1Tim 2:5). On the other hand, we have many intercessors who pray to God for us. The intercessions of angels and saints for us are merely a pleading type of prayer. This intercession is completely different to Christ’s atoning mediation.

Our belief in the saints’ intercession is biblical, as it appears from the following points:

- According to the Lord’s saying, saints who departed are still alive (Luke 20:37,38; Matt 22:32; Mark 12:26). In addition, Moses and Elijah appeared at Jesus’ transfiguration (Luke 9:28-33).

- God disclosed many secrets concerning the future of His men in both the Old and the New Testaments (Acts 20:22, 23, 29, 30; 2 Pet 1:14). No wonder that He reveals our conditions to the saints who are in Paradise.
Therefore Abraham knew that Moses and other prophets had come (Luke 16: 29-31), and those who are in heaven rejoice for the repentance of a sinner (Luke 15:7-10).

- The believers who departed have a kind of privilege before God, therefore the Lord blessed Isaac for the sake of Abraham his father (Gen 26:5), and He was gracious to Israel and had compassion on them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (2 kings 13:23).

- We, the striving members, ask for the intercessions of the saints, as Jacob did when he asked for the intercessions of his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac (Gen 32:9). Moses asked for the intercession of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 32:13).

The Holy Scriptures declare many times that God requests people to ask the intercession of the righteous. For example:

- The request to pray for one another is countless in the Holy Bible (James 5:13; 2Thess 3:1; Heb 13:18; Eph 6:18, 19). And if these saints ask us to pray for them, shall we not ask them to pray for us? If we ask the prayers of human beings, is it too much to ask the prayers of the angels?

- He asked for Abraham’s intercession and made it a condition for forgiving Abimelech (Gen 20:7).

- He conditioned the intercession and prayer of Job for his three friends so that He would forgive them (Job 42:7,8).

- In both events God Himself spoke to the erring person. However, He did not grant him forgiveness directly but conditioned the forgiveness to the prayer of the saint for the sinner so that the sinner might receive forgiveness and the saint would be venerated in the eyes of people. So, God not only accepts this mediation but rather asks for it.

- The Lord presented to Abraham the subject of Sodom (Gen 18:17) and gave him the opportunity to intercede for its people. The mere fact that the Lord would not destroy the city for the sake of the righteous who lived in it gives us an idea not only of Abraham’s dignity but also of the dignity of those righteous in front of the Lord (Gen 18:26-32). The phrase “for the sake
of…” signifies that God saves persons for the sake of others; and it is also a clear proof of the mediation of the righteous for the sake of sinners. The Lord accepts this mediation without the beneficiaries asking for it.

- The intercession of Mosses for the people of Israel when God willed to destroy them because they worshipped the golden calf (Exodus 32:7-14).

These examples represent intercessions of living persons for the sake of living persons. As for the departed, they have greater favor with God to the extent that He has mercy on people for their sake even without them praying. How much more then if they do pray for someone? For example:

- God did not tear Solomon’s kingdom away from him in his days for the sake of his father David (1Kings 11:12-34). It is worthy to notice that in this chapter the Lord repeats the phrase “for the sake of My servant David” three times.

- The Psalmist prayed saying, “For Your servant David's sake, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed” (Ps 132:10). If David has such favor with God, how much more has the Virgin Mary, the angels, John the Baptist, who is the greatest born of women, and the martyrs, who were tortured and tasted death for the sake of the Lord?

- Since we ask the prayers of our fellows on earth, why do we not ask the prayers of those whom “shine like the brightness of the firmament” (Daniel 12:3)? And why do we not ask the prayers of those who fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2Tim 4:7)?

- The prayers of men for each other (whether they have departed or are still striving in the flesh) is a manifestation of the mutual love which exists between humans; a proof of man’s belief that those who have departed are still living and that their prayers are accepted by God, and an indication that God venerates His saints. Those who preceded us pray for us, and we through love pray for those who departed, and God in His Fatherhood appreciates this mutual love.
Saints’ Icons

We venerate the icons of saints, consecrated by the prayers and Holy Myron, and put them on the iconostasis (icon stand), church walls and doors, as a sign of our communion with them in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For God honors those who honor Him (1Sam 2:30), He attributes Himself to them (Gen 26:24; 28:13), and hears their supplications, so we also honor them by giving incense before them, bowing down, kissing them and burning candles before their icons and relics. Every honor that is given to the icon passes to its prototype. We do not prostrate ourselves before the icon as a divinity, but we adore Him who dwelt in and filled them, and sanctified their life, asking Him to work also in us and with us.

Saint’s relics

The Holy Bible states that even the bones of Elisha had raised a dead body (2King 13:21), not by the virtue of their material as bones, but because of God’s action through them. Also, the shadow of St. Peter the Apostle healed the sick, and the handkerchief and cloth of St. Paul exorcised evil spirits. These are examples of God’s continuous action through His holy saints, even after their departure.

Churches were erected either on martyrdom sites of famous saints or the relics of such martyrs were transferred to the various churches. St. John, in his vision, says, “I saw under the Altar, the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (Rev 6:9). Erecting Altars over martyrs’ relics is a declaration of the mutual love between God and His church, i.e. Christ is upon the Altar, who suffered for all, and the martyrs are beneath it, who are redeemed by His Passion.

John Damascene says, “The saints, in their lifetime, were filled with the Holy Spirit and when
they are no more, His grace abides with their spirits and with their bodies in their tombs, and also with their likeness and sacred icons, not by nature but by grace and divine power...." You can really appreciate this when you stand before the relics of these saints or their consecrated icons!