

INTERCESSION

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Introduction:

- One person praying for or on behalf of another person or situation → pleading to God on behalf others
- The principle of intercession is that Christians bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ; *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2).
- In the face of all adversity, sin, illness, satanic activity, God instructs us to intercede (Isaiah 59:16).
- To intercede in prayer with the authority of Jesus is one of the greatest needs, obligations, and joys we have as Christians.
- The justification for calling upon a **saint** in prayer is that the saints are both close to **God**, because of their holiness, and accessible to humans.
 - ❖ **Prayer for the Living**— a Christian praying to God on behalf of others.
 - ❖ **Prayers of the Saints**—asking the saints in Heaven to intercede with God on our behalf.
 - ❖ **Prayer for the Departed**—an ancient believe of the church taken from the teaching of St Paul, the great apostle, in 2Tim 1: 16-18.

Examples of intercession:

- Our father Abraham saved Lot and his family from captivity (Gen 14).
- Moses, the great prophet, interceded for his people (Ex 32: 31, 32).
- When St Peter was in prison, the Church was earnestly praying for him. He was rescued by an angel. (Acts 12:5-12)

God Himself tells us to intercede on each others behalf;

- **2Chr 7:14-15**→ If my people...pray and seek my face...then will I hear from heaven...Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered..."
- **Ezekiel 22:30-31**→ I looked for a man...who would build up the wall and stand before me ... on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them...declares the Sovereign LORD.
- **1 Timothy 2:1-4**→ I urge...that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone... that we may live peaceful...lives in all...holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour..."

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- **James 5:13-16** → is any one of you in trouble? He should pray....Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders (priests) of the church to pray over him...in the name of the Lord....The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Before Going to the Father, our Lord Jesus Interceded for His Followers
(John 17:6-26)

- I pray for them.
 - I pray...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.
- He set the example

MEDIATION & INTERCESSION

- To intercede is to go or come between two parties, to plead before one of them on behalf of the other.
- "**Mediation**" means a standing in the midst of two, for the purpose of bringing them together.

Restrict the word *mediation* to the action of **Christ**, and *intercession* to the action of **St Mary the holy Virgin, angels**, and the **saints**.

- Jesus stands in the midst between **God** and **man** partaking of the natures of both, and therefore, by that very fact, fitted to act as Mediator between them.
- He is the Mediator in the absolute sense of the word, in a way that no one else can possibly be. "For there is one **God**, and one mediator of **God** and men, the man **Christ Jesus**" (1 Timothy 2:5). → We cannot enter Heaven without Him.
- Our Lord Christ **prayed**: "That they all may be one, as you, Father, in me, and I in you. . . . I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:21-23).
- **Intercession** → praying for us. **Invocation** → asking them to help us.
- Those who oppose intercession, think that we are dishonouring the one Mediator of God and men; Jesus Christ.

THE SAINTS

St Ephraim the Syrian: "You victorious martyrs who endured torments gladly for the sake of the God and Saviour, you who have boldness of speech toward the Lord himself, you saints, intercede for us who are timid and sinful men, full of sloth, that the grace of Christ may come upon us..."

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St John Chrysostom: "He that wears the purple [i.e., a royal man] . . . stands begging of the saints to be his patrons with God, and he that wears a diadem begs the tentmaker [St Paul] and the fisherman [St Peter] as patrons, even though they be dead".

- We are called to be priests → someone who interceded before God for a person, a family, a city or a nation (Communion and Confession; our connections with Christ are through priests). **Priest = Intercessor.**
- As Children of God we are all called to be intercessors. We have the authority to use the name of Jesus. (*John 14:12-14*) "*Most assuredly, I say to you... whatever you ask in My name... I will do... If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.*"
- The ministry of intercession is the ultimate in spiritual warfare. It defeats Satan and his strongholds over people → the devil gets so angry.
- Prayer and intercession is a powerful way of giving to another person → God had Job intercede for his friends. (*Job 42:7-10*) "... go to My servant Job... and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him..." It was only after Job interceded for his friends that God restored Job and blessed him with more than before.
- God doesn't need intercession, but He has chosen this method to bring people to Him, and so that we could be more like Jesus. Christ is the ultimate intercessor → our obligation is to try to be like Him.
- We don't have to be perfect to pray or intercede. Otherwise, there wouldn't be any prayer! David wasn't perfect, but He was constantly trying to be positioned by God in his ways and purposes.
- The mountain was moved because of people's intercession to God.
→ We have a very valuable gift that we don't use. If you were told you could fly, you'd probably try it out – you've just been told that you can speak to the saints – so go home and speak to them. When you say 'through the intercessions' really mean it and understand the power of the words you're speaking.

OBJECTIONS TO INTERCESSION – how to defend intercession of the saints:

- These doctrines are opposed to the faith and trust which we should have in God alone; that they are a denial of the merits of Christ; and that they cannot be proved from the Bible and the Fathers.

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- Honour paid to **angels** and **saints** is entirely different from the supreme **honour** due to **God** alone, and is indeed paid to them only as His servants and friends. → "By honouring the Saints who have slept in the Lord, by invoking their intercession and venerating their **relics** and **ashes**, so far is the **glory** of **God** from being diminished that it is very much increased, in proportion as the **hope** of men is thus more excited and confirmed, and they are encouraged to the imitation of the Saints".
- By interceding, we are not dishonouring God; we are glorifying Him even more.
- We can address our **prayers** directly to **God**, and He can hear us without the intervention of anyone. This doesn't prevent us from asking the help of our saints who are more pleasing to Him than we are. It is not because our **faith** and **trust** in Him are weak, nor because His **goodness** and mercy to us are less; but because we are encouraged by His **teaching** to approach Him at times through His servants.
- The **doctrine of one Mediator, Christ**, in no way excludes the invocation and intercession of **saints**. All **merit** indeed comes through Him; but this doesn't mean we shouldn't ask other Christians to pray for us. We should especially ask those Christians in Heaven, as their sanctification is completed. *'The prayer of a righteous man has great power'* (James 5:16). St Paul, who insisted strongly on the sole mediatorship of **Christ**, begged for the **prayers** of his brethren: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, through **our Lord Jesus Christ**...that you help me in your **prayers** for me to **God**" (Romans 15:30).
- **St. Cyprian** said; "Let us be mutually mindful of each other, let us ever **pray** for each other, and if one of us shall, by the speediness of the Divine, depart hence first, let our **love** continue in the presence of the Lord, let not **prayer** for our brethren and sisters cease in the presence of the mercy of the Father".
 - Promise to pray for each other, even after death.
 - God told us to love one another – would He then not want us to pray for one another?
- **St. Jerome** said: "When you perceive that God is chastening you, fly not to his enemies . . . but to his friends, the martyrs, the saints, and those who were pleasing to him, and who have great power [in God]".
 - God understands the importance of friends. What better friends than those in Heaven.
- There's a difference in praying for the departed and praying for us → "At the Lord's table we don't commemorate **martyrs** in the same way that we do others who rest in peace so as to **pray** for them, but rather that they may **pray** for us that we may follow in their footsteps" (St. Augustine)

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- Not only do those in heaven pray *with* us, they also pray *for* us. In the book of Revelation, St John sees that "the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8). Thus the saints in heaven offer to God the prayers of the saints on earth.

Answering Objections to the Intercession of the Saints

The Bible says that contacting the dead is an abominable sin (Deut. 18:10–12); the intercession of the saints is therefore blasphemous.

- This objection is a sincere one.
- It stems from refusing to do anything that takes away from the adoration that belongs only to God.
- When the Bible mentions necromancy, it condemns the practice of conjuring up the dead, as Saul did.
- When our Lord Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah the prophets during the Transfiguration, this was not necromancy.
- When King David asked the angels of heaven to bless the Lord, this also was not offensive to God.

ALSO

- In John 11:26 the Lord, Jesus, said, "...and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."
- All this talk of "praying to the dead" and "the dead praying for the living," when the people of whom we are speaking are not even dead!
- "Now He is *not God of the dead, but of the living: for all live to Him.*" (Lk 20:38)
- Now if God is not God of the dead, and if the Saints are no longer living, then is He no longer their God? When you die, will God cease to be *your* God?
- If you will concede that the Saints are *alive*, is it reasonable then to suppose that these same Saints, who prayed for each other and for all Christians while on earth, would lose interest in us once they reach the kingdom of heaven?
- **St. Jerome:** "You say in your book that while we live we are able to pray for each other, but afterwards when we have died, the prayer of no person for another can be heard. . . . But if the apostles and martyrs while still in the body can pray for others, at a **time** when they must still be anxious for themselves, how much more after their crowns, victories, and triumphs are won?! One **man**, **Moses**, obtains from **God** pardon for six hundred thousand men in arms; and Stephen, the imitator of the Lord, and the first **martyr** in Christ, begs forgiveness for his **persecutors**; and shall their power be less after having begun to be with Christ? The **Apostle Paul** declares that two hundred three score and sixteen **souls**, sailing with him, were freely given him; and, after he is dissolved and has begun to be with

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Christ, shall he close his lips, and not be able to utter a word in behalf of those who throughout the whole world **believed** at his preaching of the Gospel?

- Romans 12:4-5 says: "For as in one body we have many members, and all members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." Would you dare to say that when a Saint dies, he ceases to be a member of the Body of Christ? What would you believe their *function* to be?

But if you pray to the saints you are worshiping them.

- Define your terms. "Pray" is an Old English word that means simply "to ask." This word has become synonymous with worship.
- If you ask a person to pray for you, it proves that you do not think that he is God. We don't ask the saints to answer our prayers – we ask them to ask God to answer our prayers.

If I had a problem at work, why would I take it to the volunteers in the mailroom if I were friends with the CEO himself? Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus is our one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)?

- If we shouldn't ask those in heaven for their prayers since we can go straight to Jesus, then no Christian on earth should ask another for his prayers.
- When one believer asks another for his prayers, it is not because God is too distant or cruel to listen to him. It's the opposite; God is so generous he has given the body of Christ such unity that each member can pray for the others. This is a great gift, for "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16), and the angels and saints in heaven are inarguably righteous.
- Though the Bible tells us that we must go to God in our necessities, it also encourages us to ask for each other's prayers. After all, salvation is a family affair. Can the eye say to the hand, "I don't need you" → we shouldn't say that we don't need the prayers of the rest of the body of Christ (on earth or in heaven).
- A mediator is one who comes between two parties with the purpose of uniting them. Christ played a role of mediation that only the God-man could, but Christians are still called to serve as mediators between Christ and the world. In no way does this diminish the work of Christ → it manifests it.

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Aren't the saints in heaven busy worshiping God?

- Imagine a man who spent 80 years on earth serving God and praying hard. After passing away, he walks to Heaven and there the angels check the book and his name is there and he gets ready to enter. As he walks through the gates, he notices a large sign that reads, "Welcome to the Father's house; we hope you enjoy your stay. In heaven, you may worship God, but you're not allowed to pray."
- To think of those in heaven as unwilling or unable to pray for us is to have a grave misconception of heaven. It is not an isolated part of the body of Christ that exists without concern for the other members of the body who are still working out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).
- If intercession among Christians is "good and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Tim. 2:1–4), wouldn't it be also pleasing to God in heaven?
- In the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–31), the rich man shows concern for his family on earth, even though he is in hell. If a person in hell has such concern, and those in heaven are perfected in love and can finally pray with an undivided heart for the Church of God, how could they not be concerned about our salvation?

How can the saints hear our prayers?

- The book of Revelation describes people in heaven who are aware of the happenings on earth (Rev. 6:11; 7:13–14). They have this capacity according to God's designs and not of their own power.

There are millions of Christians. If they all prayed to St Mary, even if she could hear the prayers, she'd have to be omniscient to comprehend them all. And where would she get the time?

- Since St Mary is in heaven, it is literally true that she does not have time to answer all the petitions—she has eternity. Time in the afterlife is not the same as it is here.
- 50 people in an Internet chat room can communicate simultaneously from around the world. If modern technology can enable humans to do this, God is infinitely capable "by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

Isn't intercession unnecessary? God doesn't require it, so why not go directly to Him? In fact much of what Jesus did was to remove the need for an intermediary in our relationship with him.

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- We don't need the saints to get to God, but without the saints around you, your experience of God is not in agreement with the experience of God described in the Bible, but more like the modern inventions of God. The God you are praying to be surrounded by hosts of angels and saints. You cannot isolate Him.
- I am concerned though with the desire on the part of many to want to "protect" God. The intercession of the saints is sometimes looked upon as a violation of God's sovereignty or Jesus right to be the only mediator, etc. It is so linear: two dimensional and sterile to me. As hard as it is for me to really accept the intercession of the saints, it is far more difficult for me to accept such a lonely and bleak picture, particularly when confronted with Isaiah's description of heavenly worship.

"Therefore, we pray [ask] you, the most excellent among women, who glories in the confidence of your maternal honours, that you would unceasingly keep us in remembrance."

Glory is to God, forever. Amen.