

# The Veneration of Images and Saints

To help us remember and understand the Catholic use of statues and images, we give here this adaptation of a Catholic Catechism.

*Adapted from Father Francis Spirago*

**T**he veneration of sacred pictures and images is as old as Christianity itself.

In the Catacombs, representations are found of Christ, of the Mother of God with the Divine Child, and of biblical scenes from the Old and New Testament, calculated to strengthen the Christians in times of persecution, by reminding them of God's omnipotence and of a future resurrection.

With the spread of Christianity, the veneration paid to images increased. Pictures, statues, and crosses were seen not in the churches alone, but in the market-place and on highways.

The veneration of images answers to a need of our human nature; we respect the portraits of those whom we love or esteem; moreover it is the will of God that man,

who lost true happiness for the sake of material things, should regain it by means of material things.

The Jews were strictly forbidden to make images or to bow down to them (*Ex. 20:4*) because they had a strong propensity towards idolatry, and the Son of God had not yet become man.

In spite of this prohibition, God commanded two golden cherubim to be placed one on each side of the propitiatory in the Holy of Holies (*Ex. 25:18*). God also commanded the making of a brazen serpent in the wilderness, wherein the Israelites were commanded to look that they might be healed. (*Num. 21:8*)

## **Honor the Images of Saints**

We honor the images of the saints by giving them a place in our dwellings, we say our prayers before them, we

salute them respectfully, we adorn them with offerings, we make pilgrimages to their shrines.

The reverence we pay to the image of a saint is not paid to the picture or image itself, but to the individual it represents; that is, to Christ, to Our Lady, or one of the saints.

When we adore the Cross we adore Him Who died thereon. By showing respect to the portrait of a king, we testify our respect for the monarch; and disrespect manifested to his portrait is a personal affront to him.

When the book of the Gospel is kissed, it is the Word of God therein contained that is venerated.

Thus when we kiss our parents or our children, we express the love and fondness of our hearts, and in venerating images, we express our love for the person these images represent. And when incense is burned, or tapers or lights are lit before the images, it is a symbol of the light of the Holy Ghost and the virtues wherewith the saints were endowed.

It is not from the images themselves that we ask help, it is from God, through the

intercession of Our Lady and the saints. None but the heathen imagine that there is any virtue or supernatural power in the image itself. Moses did not think that his staff worked miracles, but rather he knew that it was God who powerfully assisted him.

### Veneration

St. John Damascene says that the Holy Ghost surrounds the images of the saints with a certain halo of grace. Where the cross is erected, the malicious designs of evil are defeated.

How often a soul sunk in sin has been touched and converted by the sight of an image; how often have pictures comforted and encouraged devout persons, especially at the moment of death!

While gazing upon an image we pray with greater recollection; images are steps whereby we ascend more easily in spirit to Heaven.

And as one's prayers, when offered at the shrine of some saint, are more fervent, so they are more readily granted; the *ex-votos* hung beside the image testify to the efficacy of the saint's intercession.

They are also a constant admonition to us; either by placing vividly before us one of the truths of religion, or exhorting us to imitate the example of the saint.

The work of the artist does indeed often prove more influential than the words of the preacher, for the impressions we receive through the ear have less impact upon the mind than those which we receive

through the eye.

St. Gregory the Great calls pictures the books of the unlearned.

In the Middle Ages, before there were any printed books, pictures were widely disseminated among the people. From those times we date the Christmas Crib, the holy sepulcher, the Stations of the Cross, and other holy images. **FC**

## Conclusion

**So we must remember not to be fooled by the false reasoning of heretics and scoffers who attack our Catholic Faith for the pious use of sacred statues and images. We must remember to make reparation for sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We must make reparation for those sinners who attack Our Lady in Her sacred statues and images.**

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We thus better appreciate how Our Blessed Mother's visitations at Fatima reiterate the key dogmas of the Faith, especially those dogmas that have come under attack in

the second half of the 20th Century into the present. By asking for reparation of the "blasphemies against Her Perpetual Virginity", as part of the Five First Saturday devotions, Our Lady once again shows Herself to be "conqueror of all heresies". **FC**