

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

## CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS 101

### Intercession

#### Question: “Why do Catholics pray to Saints?”

**Answer:** We don't!!! One of the most common misconceptions about Catholics is that we pray to Mary and the Saints. It is very important to make the distinction between “praying to” someone and asking for intercession “from someone.” Saint Thomas Aquinas made it very clear in his *Summa Theologica* that the Saints merely intercede for us, they do not answer prayers.

Prayer is offered to a person in two ways: first, as to be fulfilled by him, secondly, as to be obtained through him. In the first way we offer prayer to God alone, since all our prayers ought to be directed to the acquisition of grace and glory, which God alone gives, according to Ps. 83:12, "The Lord will give grace and glory." But in the second way we pray to the saints, whether angels or men, not that God may through them know our petitions, but that our prayers may be effective through their prayers and merits.<sup>1</sup>

Sacred Scripture testifies to the fact that we should pray for one another. In his letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul wrote, “We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10). There are numerous other Scripture verses that challenge us to be men and women of intercession.<sup>2</sup>

Christians, to the degree that they are intimately connected to Christ who is the Eternal Intercessor,<sup>3</sup> are called into a ministry of intercession. The Book of Revelation portrays the saints—those who have died in faith—as standing around the throne of God in prayer, praise, and worship.<sup>4</sup> When Catholics involve the saints in their prayers, they are simply asking for the intercession of those who are closest to God—literally standing around His throne!

Thomas Aquinas further explained intercession in his *Summa* by explaining that the saints around the throne of God can hear our prayers, whether made vocally or interiorly, because they are in the Word, Jesus Christ. As our prayers are offered to Christ, they resound throughout the whole Body of Christ, Who is the Word of God.<sup>5</sup> Having heard our prayer, the saints bless us through their intercession. While we may thank other people for their intercession, we only give praise and glory to God for an answered prayer.

To [God] alone do we offer religious worship when praying... because by doing so we confess that He is the Author of our goods: but not to [the saints] whom we call upon as our advocates in God's presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 4 from “Of Prayer.” Taken from the Benziger Bros. edition, 1947. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 3:1; 2 Corinthians 9:14, 13:9b; Hebrews 13:18; James 5:16; Matthew 5:44 to name a few.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 7:25: “Consequently [Christ] is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 5:11-14.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:1