

Saints offer a channel to the Trinity

“Will you say a prayer for me?”

How many times has someone asked you that question, or have you asked it of someone else? We all recognize the power of intercessory prayer when we ask another person to petition God on our behalf. We know that prayer can be beneficial, to the one who prays and to the one for whom the prayer is said.

As Catholics, we also often turn to special allies for this kind of prayer, people who might be in a position to lift our petitions to God a little more easily because of their proximity – the saints. Since they are already in heaven, they enjoy a “more direct” channel to the Trinity, in whose presence they dwell.

“Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God forever, for they ‘see him as he is,’ face to face” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1023).

So, just as we ask our friends and family to say a prayer for us, it makes sense for us to call on the saints to intercede on our behalf to the Father. In fact, it may be even more beneficial.

We have no way of knowing how many are in this communion of saints. The church did not begin to formally canonize saints until the year 993. Before that, saints were typically declared by popular acclamation, or those who were martyred were presumed to be saints. The much more formal process we now know in which people are declared “servant of God,” then “venerable,” then “blessed” before being canonized, is a more modern construct to determine without question – as best we humans can know – that a person is with God in heaven.

Some saints have feast days on the church’s liturgical calendar, but most do not. And so for them, we have All Saints Day, celebrated Nov. 1. This is the day when we honor all the holy men and women – canonized or not, with a feast day or not – who are in the communion of saints. We ask for their support and prayers. We ask for their guidance in living holy lives. We hope we can follow their examples, of living an ordinary life and making it extraordinary by becoming closer to God.

I remember when I was in grade school and the church removed the feast day for St. Christopher, noting that too little was known about this early Christian martyr who was thought to have carried the Christ child across a raging river. It was possible that he was a legendary figure, and not real. I like to think that St. Christopher, my patron saint, was indeed real, and a real Christ-bearer, and his feast day is now part of All Saints Day. I often call upon him for special intercession.

So, too, Nov. 1 might be the feast of St. Low, a saint my Uncle Joe imagined. He said he used to pray to “St. Low,” the lowest saint in heaven. Uncle Joe figured that the lowest saint in heaven would not have too many people asking for his prayers, and would have plenty of time to pay attention to the prayers of a working man from the South Side of Chicago and take those prayers to his boss.

We are graced in downtown Baltimore to have the St. Jude Shrine, led by the Pallottine priests and brothers, as a nationwide center for prayers to the well-loved patron saint of hopeless causes. We also have local ties to saints such as Elizabeth Ann Seton and John Neumann.

Since we do not know how many are in the communion of saints, we also don’t know how many are waiting in purgatory, in need of our prayers to help them go on to glory. “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC, 1030). The catechism teaches us that our prayers for the dead bring them consolation and atonement. It is fitting, then, that All Souls Day comes Nov. 2, immediately after All Saints Day, so that we can offer our prayers for the souls of our loved ones.

When we unite our prayers with those of the saints and bring them together to the Lord, we can allow God to do great things through us, by cooperating with his grace.

May the saints continue to inspire us, and may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

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