

Can the Saints in Heaven Pray for Us?

by Sebastian R Fama

Catholics are often criticized for asking the saints in heaven for help. Clearly, the Bible encourages intercessory prayer. And a close look at its pages reveals that the saints in heaven can also participate. We know that "the prayer of a righteous person has great power" (James 5:16). Who could be more righteous or pray more fervently than those in heaven? We know that they care for us, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7). And it is reasonable to conclude that they know what is happening in our lives. How else would they know when we repent? Obviously, God wills it. Why would God will such a thing? He wills it because He wants His children to love one another (John 13:34).

The Bible gets even more specific. It shows the saints in heaven presenting our prayers along with their own to Jesus: "The four living creatures and 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**" (Revelation 5:8). Also, "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and **he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints** upon the golden altar before the throne. **And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God**" (Revelation 8:3-4). Note that incense represents our prayers, and that the angels and elders in heaven present our prayers to God.

In Matthew 18:10 we read: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." What do you suppose that the little ones' angels would be doing on their behalf before God? Praying for them is the only logical answer. Evidence is also found in the Old Testament. In the book of 2 Maccabees 15:11-14 we see the high priest Onias and the prophet Jeremiah praying for Israel. At the time this took place they had both already died.

Demonstrating early Christian belief, Origen wrote in the year 233: "But not the High Priest [Christ] alone prays for those who pray sincerely, but also the angels...as also the souls of the saints who have already fallen asleep" (*On Prayer* 11). Cyril of Jerusalem wrote the following: "Then [during the Eucharistic prayer] we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition..." (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:9 [A.D. 350]). So yes, the saints in heaven can pray for us. The Bible teaches it, and the early Church believed it.