

Chapter XVII: On the Honor to Be Shown to Deceased Saints

The honor due to deceased saints is a form of charity, where we honor and revere them with constant love and fellowship, though they are no longer in our sight, yet not with servitude. Augustine, in his book *On True Religion*, chapter on the final religion, writes about this.

This honor and veneration must be distinguished from the religious worship due to God. The worship of religion, or sacred adoration, is due to God alone; however, we honor the deceased saints with a lesser form of veneration, which Augustine calls the honor of love and fellowship, as he writes in his sixth tome, in his *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, book 20, chapter 21.

Augustine's words are: "We honor the martyrs with the honor of love and fellowship, which we also give to holy people in this life, as we acknowledge that their hearts were prepared for such suffering for the truth of the Gospel. But they are venerated even more in death, as they are now free from all uncertainties. And we honor them with greater confidence, as we now praise them as victors living in a more blessed life, rather than still fighting in this life." Yet the worship that is called *latría* in Greek, which in Latin cannot be fully expressed with a single word, refers to a divine service that is due only to God. We do not teach that anyone other than God is to be worshiped with this kind of service.

The honor and veneration we have for the saints, who now reign with Christ in heaven, is political or civil and human: for the saints in heaven have not ceased to be citizens with us of the same city of God. Paul calls it a shared commonwealth. This human veneration is because the saints were humans, as we are, and are still human in their nature, as we are.

The Papists deny that saints who have passed on can be given political or civil honor, claiming that they no longer converse with us in a political or civil way. But this is a misunderstanding. There is a distinction between physical and spiritual governance, as well as physical and spiritual communication. Our fellowship with the saints is marvelous in heaven and spiritual. But the Papists think only in terms of the physical and carnal.

The parts of the honor to be shown to deceased saints are: thanksgiving to God for them; a remembrance with praise, coupled with imitation of them; the faithful execution of their just will; and the desire for union with them in Christ the Lord.

Thanksgiving to God for the martyrs is when we acknowledge God's gifts and blessings both upon those who have died and through them upon us, and we give thanks to God for them even after their death. This thanksgiving is fitting because:
A general mandate of gratitude to God requires it.

We have approved examples of such behavior. The Christian Church has always given thanks to God for the benefits given to prophets, apostles, saints, and martyrs, and through them, to us. For example, it has given thanks for the charisms of faith, hope, and love, and for the deliverance of the faithful from the miseries of this life, for which martyrs poured out their blood.

Remembrance with praise and imitation of the virtues of the deceased is when we recall and bring to others' attention the piety and virtues of the saints, and when we rightly celebrate these

virtues, we imitate them and defend their good reputation against slander. For example, David celebrated the virtues of Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1. Likewise, Paul praises the faith of many in Hebrews 11, and James praises the patience of Job in James 5:11. We joyfully and reverently honor the memory of the apostles and other saints.

Augustine writes wisely in his *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (book 20, chapter 21): "The Christian people commemorate the memory of the martyrs with a religious solemnity, both to stir up imitation and so that their merits may be shared, and that we may be aided by their prayers." And further: "What is offered, is offered to God who crowned the martyrs, at the places commemorating those whom He crowned, so that through the memory of these places, greater affection may arise, sharpening our charity, both towards those we can imitate and towards Him who aids us."

How the ancient Christians celebrated the anniversaries of the martyrs' sufferings and days is described in Simon Goulart's annotations to the 34th epistle of Cyprian.

The faithful execution of the will of the deceased is a part of the honor shown to them, when we faithfully fulfill what they justly willed and requested of us, either by natural right, friendship, or some other honorable reason. Thus, children obey the instructions of their deceased parents, just as Joseph the Patriarch took his father Jacob's body from Egypt to Canaan (Genesis 47:29-30; Genesis 50:4 and following). The Rechabites followed their deceased father's command in Jeremiah 35:6. This also pertains to the religious observance of the wills of the dead, as mentioned in Galatians 3:15. Thus, David faithfully fulfilled what he had promised Jonathan.

The desire for union with the holy deceased in Christ is a part of the honor shown to the saints when we both long for and express in words our desire to be united with the saints who now triumph with Christ in heaven, that we may also see His glory and, together with them, celebrate Christ in the heavenly Church.

This constitutes the true and legitimate honor and memory of the deceased saints.

However, the Papists do great injury to the deceased saints and deprive them of the honor due to them. First, they ascribe to them an honor that is owed to God alone and which the saints themselves seriously refused. They invoke the saints with religious devotion and venerate them with other religious acts. But who would give to the saints what should not be given to them, which they did not want to be given to them while on earth because they loved God, and even more so do not want now that they have attained the perfection of divine love? Even if this seems like honor, it is an insult.

Moreover, they offer prayers for the deceased saints, thus denying that they are already blessed. For example, when they greet the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, with the words "Hail Mary," they are praying for her. After all, what is a greeting but a prayer for the one being greeted? In the Canon of the Mass, in the commemoration for the deceased, the priest prays that God may grant to all those resting in Christ a place of refreshment, light, and peace. Bellarmine, in his second book on the Mass, chapter 25, says they pray in this way because the saints do not yet have peace and rest from their torment and from the longing for divine vision. He does say

that this only applies to those in Purgatory, but the Canon of the Mass prays for all who rest in Christ, without exception.