

LESSON 50: DEVOTION TO THE SAINTS

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 9	:	Cover points 1 to 13
For Intermediate Level / Age 12	:	Cover points 1 to 16
For Advanced Level / Age 15	:	Cover points 1 to 23

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lessons, we have been learning about liturgical prayers as well as devotional prayers of the Church. In this lesson, we will specifically discuss our relationship with the saints, since many of our devotional prayers are directed at them.

Current lesson:

1. When members of the Church die, they do not cease being part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Their souls go through a process of purification (Purgatory) in preparation for them to spend eternity with God. There are also those whose souls are already pure at the time of their physical death, in which case, they immediately enter into the Beatific Vision (Heaven).

While they were on earth, they were part of the Church Militant, and in purgatory they were part of the Church Suffering, and in heaven they are part of the Church Triumphant. The Church Militant, Church Suffering, and Church Triumphant are just different facets of the One Church of Jesus Christ existing in different states. The entire Church together, in all its three different states, is a “communion of saints”, as found in our Creeds.

2. The faith of many of these souls was inspirational to other people throughout their lifetimes on earth, and upon their physical death, the Church has permitted for people to seek their continual intercessions on their behalf. This is especially true if the Church has already confirmed, through a stringent process of investigation, that a particular soul has already achieved the Beatific Vision. These souls are called saints.
3. Our departed brothers and sisters in Christ reign in heaven with God, who is God of the living (Matthew 22:32), and therefore enjoy an especially close relationship with Him. Of course, this does not deny that Christians still combating their way through the trials of this world are saints, because we are children of God even now. But in the new life, we will be like God (1 John 3:2).

The lives and faith of the saints in Heaven show the perfections of God’s holiness shining through our human weakness. By contemplating and honouring their goodness, we come better to know and revere the holiness of God. Calling to mind the virtues of these saints helps us to appreciate better God’s all-encompassing goodness. While we do not worship them, we hold them in high honour and admiration because they have completed their journey of faith successfully, and we aspire to become like them. In our veneration of the saints, we admire them deeply as models of Christian faithfulness and seek their constant

intercessions on our behalf. Worship of God does involve prayer, but prayer to the saints does not mean that we are worshipping them.

4. As Scripture indicates, those in heaven are aware of the prayers of those on earth. This can be seen, for example, in Revelation 5:8. John sees that “the twenty-four elders [the leaders of the people of God in heaven] fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints”. If the saints in heaven are offering our prayers to God, then they must be aware of our prayers. They are aware of our petitions and present them to God by interceding for us.
5. When we face problems in life, it is common for us to ask a close friend or a relative to pray for us. It is very good that we do ask people to pray for us and our needs, and also to pray for them. Praying to the saints is like asking our friends to pray for us. Of course, we still pray to Jesus, but our friend is praying with us. Not only does their prayer help benefit the receiver, but also the person who prays: it draws us all into closer union with Christ and with each other.

But asking a saint to pray for us is even better than asking our friends to pray for us. Since they already exist in a state of perfection, their prayers for us are more perfect than our own prayers as well as the prayers of other people on earth.

6. The saints are our fellow Christians who have died in God’s favour, and now stand before God face to face, in the closest union with Him. God is well pleased with them, and so, He is especially willing to grant their petitions because their petitions are perfect.

The faith and devotion of the saints can support our own weaknesses and supply what is lacking in our own faith and devotion. Jesus regularly supplied for one person based on another person’s faith (see Matthew 8:13, 15:28, 17:15-18; Mark 9:17-29; Luke 8:49-55). God answers in particular the prayers of the righteous. St James declares, “The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects” (James 5:16-18). Yet those Christians in heaven are more righteous, since they have been made perfect to stand in God’s presence (Hebrews 12:22-23), than anyone on earth, meaning their prayers would be even more efficacious.

7. Some people may ask why we do not “go directly to Jesus instead”. Praying for one another is simply part of what Christians do, and is a Christian obligation. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, St Paul strongly encouraged Christians to intercede for many different things, and that passage is by no means unique in his writings. In his other letters, St Paul directly asks others to pray for him (Romans 15:30-32, Ephesians 6:18-20, Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1), and he assured them that he was praying for them as well (2 Thessalonians 1:11). Jesus Himself required us to pray for others, and not only for those who asked us to do so (Matthew 5:44).
8. In terms of our relationship with the saints, the Church distinguishes between the Latin expressions *latria* (adoration of God) and *dulia* (the reverence of saints). The term *dulia* refers to the honour that is due to human beings, especially those who lived and died in

God's friendship - in other words, the saints. Scripture indicates that honour is due to these individuals (Matthew 10:41).

A special term, *hyperdulia*, was coined to refer to the special honour given to the Virgin Mary, who bore Jesus – God in the flesh – in her womb. This term *hyperdulia* indicates that the honour due to her as Christ's own Mother is more than the *dulia* given to other saints. It is greater in degree, but still of the same kind as that which we accord to the saints. However, since Mary is a finite creature, the honour she is due is fundamentally different in kind from the *latria* owed to the infinite Creator.

The difference in the way we relate with God and the saints is not one of degree but of kind. The kind of relationship that the Church has with God and that which the Church has with the saints are both entirely different. The prayers of the Mass, the central act of Catholic worship, are *latria*, since they are directed to God and Jesus, not to the saints. *Latria* involves the Eucharistic sacrifice, which we do not offer to Mary or the saints. But our devotional prayers to Mary and the saints, when asking for their intercessions on our behalf, are *dulia* (and *hyperdulia* in the case of Mary), and these do not involve the Eucharistic sacrifice.

(The problem with the English language is that it has not been able to translate the terms *latria* and *dulia* accurately because of the limitation of its vocabulary. Note that the word "worship" is found in some very old Church documents in relation with the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is because although the term "worship" in the current English-speaking world refers exclusively to the adoration of God, its use in older English was more ambiguous whereby it could be used interchangeably in the context of both veneration as well as divine worship. In today's use of the term "worship", it appears to be clearer that the word indicates divine adoration and not just veneration.)

9. We also venerate the angels, because they are spirit beings who have dedicated themselves to doing God's will. But again, we do not worship them in the way that we adore only God.

CCC 352: "The Church venerates the angels who help her on her earthly pilgrimage and protect every human being."

It is quite common for us to address these angels as Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, or Saint Raphael, although they are not strictly saints in the sense of those human saints who have passed from this earth. But the word "saint" basically means "holy", and in addressing them as "saints", we mean that they are holy angels of God.

10. It is also a common practice for us to use images (two-dimensional icons and three-dimensional statues) of the saints to help us in our prayer. This is a practice that is highly encouraged by the Church. Icons and statues represent the spiritual reality rather than the physical reality. Just as it helps to remember one's deceased loved ones by looking at their photographs, so it helps to recall the example of the saints by looking at pictures of them. Using such images as a way to excite our faith is a good thing.

CCC 2130: “Nevertheless, already in the Old Testament, God ordained or permitted the making of images that pointed symbolically toward salvation by the incarnate Word: so it was with the bronze serpent, the ark of the covenant, and the cherubim.”

CCC 2131: “Basing itself on the mystery of the incarnate Word, the seventh ecumenical council at Nicaea (787) justified against the iconoclasts the veneration of icons - of Christ, but also of the Mother of God, the angels, and all the saints. By becoming incarnate, the Son of God introduced a new ‘economy’ of images.”

11. The worship of images of the saints, as if they were God, is condemned by the Church as the sin of idolatry. But at the same time, the use of these images for veneration is not equal to worship, and is therefore strongly encouraged.

CCC 2114: “Idolatry is a perversion of man’s innate religious sense. An idolater is someone who ‘transfers his indestructible notion of God to anything other than God.’”

CCC 2132: “The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, ‘the honour rendered to an image passes to its prototype’, and ‘whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it’. The honour paid to sacred images is a ‘respectful veneration’, not the adoration due to God alone: Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but tends toward that whose image it is.”

12. A very common practice exists in the Church of attributing certain specific causes to certain specific saints, most often because a certain saint had something to do with a particular cause during his/her lifetime. These are called patron saints.

Patron saints are chosen as special protectors or guardians over various areas of life. These areas can include occupations, illnesses, churches, countries, causes – anything that is important to the human life. The earliest records show that people and churches were named after apostles and martyrs as early as the fourth century, so that those saints become patrons of those people or churches. Here are some examples:

St Luke the Evangelist is the patron saint of artists.

St John the Baptist is the patron saint of Baptism.

St Thomas More is the patron saint of lawyers.

St Thomas Aquinas is the patron saint of teachers and academicians.

St John Marie Vianney is the patron saint of priests.

St Francis Xavier is the patron saint of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (Mary) is the patron saint of the United States of America.

Every Catholic, at the point of his Baptism, is also encouraged to take on the name of a saint and to embrace his namesake as patron saint so that this saint can be called upon to pray for him along his journey of faith and life.

13. Identify a few saints whose life stories may be interesting for the students, and tell the students the stories of these saints.
14. Being recognised as a saint by the Church is a very high honour. It means the saint's name is added to the official catalogue of saints, and that Masses and feast days can be celebrated in his or her honour. Churches can then be dedicated in the saint's memory, and his or her name can be used in public prayers, such as litanies.

Note that the Catholic Church does not *make* saints; it only *recognises* people whom God has made into saints. That process of official recognition is called the process of canonisation. This process is made up of four steps:

- A) *Request for canonisation.* At least five years after a person's death (unless a special exception is made by the pope), a formal request is made to consider him or her for sainthood. The people making the request are usually from the candidate's church or religious community. They submit their request to the bishop of the diocese where the person died. The request tells how the person lived a life of holiness and lists reasons for considering the candidate for sainthood. If the bishop believes there is enough evidence to consider the person for sainthood, he asks the Vatican for permission to open a special tribunal. Witnesses are then called to attest to the candidate's goodness, holiness, devotion to God, and other virtues. If a person passes this step, he or she is named a "Servant of God".
- B) *Determination.* The bishop sends a formal report and request to the Holy See where it is reviewed by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Nine theologians read the material and determine whether there is enough cause to pass it to the entire Congregation. If so, the candidate's writings and other aspects of his or her life are studied to make sure there is nothing that goes against the teachings and practices of the Church. As part of this investigation a person called a "devil's advocate" raises questions and objections to the candidate's sainthood. This is to make sure the final decision is complete and fair, and all evidence of the candidate's saintliness is assured. Once a candidate has been determined to be virtuous and heroic in his or her faith, he or she is declared "Venerable".
- C) *Beatification.* The next step is beatification. If the candidate was a martyr, someone who died for their faith, he or she may be beatified and named "Blessed". Otherwise, a miracle brought about by the intercession of the saint must occur and be verified by the Congregation. Once the person is beatified and named "Blessed", he or she can be venerated, or officially honoured, in his or her city, diocese, region, or religious community.
- D) *Canonisation.* After being beatified, another miracle is required for the person to be canonised and officially declared a saint. Once again, the miracle must have occurred

as a result of the person's intercession. The Prefect of the Congregation then sends the cause for canonisation to the pope who makes the final decision. Once a person is canonised, he or she is officially declared a saint. The pope declares this in an official way at a special Mass in honour of the new saint.

15. It is important to know that officially canonised saints are not the only saints of the Church. All who have died from this life and have attained the Beatific Vision (Heaven) are saints. This is why the Church celebrates the Solemnity of All Saints every year on 1 November.
16. In fact, we too are bound for sainthood if we persist in living the good Catholic life. Sainthood is something that every Christian should aspire towards. For this reason, the Church calls upon us to spend our lives seeking admirable virtues so as to live holy lives.
17. Virtues are gifts from God that enable us to be in intimate friendship with Him. They are habits that need to be constantly practised, and they can diminish if we neglect them.

CCC 1803: "A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. 'The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.'"

CCC 1811: "Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil."

18. There are human virtues which we can acquire by our human efforts in order to form "firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith" (CCC 1804). A person who strives to be virtuous will freely practise the good and find "joy in leading a morally good life". When we make it a point to live virtuously through the daily choices that we make, our morality draws us into deeper "communion with divine love".

Among the human virtues, there are four crucially important ones, and they are called cardinal virtues. The term "cardinal" derives from the Latin word *cardo* for "hinge". This means that these four cardinal virtues are virtues upon which other virtues hinge or depend (CCC 1805). Because they are human virtues, they can be attained through good upbringing and discipline.

19. The four cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

CCC 1806: "*Prudence* is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; 'the prudent man looks where he is going.' 'Keep sane and sober for your prayers.' Prudence is 'right reason in action,' writes St Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is

prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.”

CCC 1807: “Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the ‘virtue of religion’. Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. ‘You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.’ ‘Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.’”

CCC 1808: “Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. ‘The Lord is my strength and my song.’ ‘In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’”

CCC 1809: “Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: ‘Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart.’ Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: ‘Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites.’ In the New Testament it is called ‘moderation’ or ‘sobriety’. We ought ‘to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world.’”

CCC 1809 also brings all these cardinal virtues together as follows: “To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul and with all one’s efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through *temperance*). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is *fortitude*). It obeys only [God] (and this is *justice*), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is *prudence*).”

Although these virtues are to be cultivated by human efforts and may perhaps often be tainted by failure, our continual efforts will be “elevated by divine grace”. This means that our human efforts will be helped by God (CCC 1810).

20. The human virtues come from the theological virtues. The theological virtues are those virtues that enhance our capacity to become like God. This is because those virtues are directly related to God in the sense that they help us to be in communion with Him. “They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object” (CCC 1812). In other words, the theological virtues are given by God, and they lead us to Him.

CCC 1813: “The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.”

21. *CCC 1814*: “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith ‘man freely commits his entire self to God.’ For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God’s will. ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ Living faith ‘work[s] through charity.’”

If we do not wilfully abandon our faith, it remains in us. But faith is more than just an intellectual acceptance of a belief. It must always be accompanied by action (also called “works”) as a way of life as well as verbal proclamations of our belief in Christ. Such faith may bring us persecution and hardship, but this is precisely how we are called to walk in the same path of the crucified Christ. (refer to CCC 1815-6)

22. *CCC 1817*: “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. ‘Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.’ ‘The Holy Spirit . . . he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.’”

Hope in God is what makes us happy people. Even if life may be discouraging or utterly difficult for us, having hope in God gives us the strength to not give up. The hope that one day we will experience Heaven and see God face to face enables us to continue loving other people even when life may seem difficult for us. As disciples of Jesus, we must expect trials in our lives, because this was exactly the path that Jesus took as well. And because we have the hope of being with Him one day, we can persevere through the trials of life. (refer to CCC 1818-21)

23. *CCC 1822*: “Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.”

Charity, or love, is the new commandment that Jesus gave to His disciples (John 13:34). He demands that we must love even people who hate us just as He died for those who hated Him. We show that we love God by observing His commandments, all of which are motivated by the law of love.

Charity is the greatest of all virtues. Saint Paul says, “. . .these remain: faith, hope and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is the virtue of charity that brings all the other virtues together as a perfect whole. Remember that “love is itself the fulfillment of all our works” (CCC 1829).

CCC 1827: “The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which ‘binds everything together in perfect harmony’; it is the *form of the virtues*; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and the goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love.”



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