

Take-Home

Saints, Statues, and the Charge of Idolatry

Abide

Module Two

What We Found

Revelation shows the prayers of God's people held in heaven: golden bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints, and an angel offering much incense with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar. Hebrews says we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, and Christ says God is not God of the dead but of the living.

And the commandment against images sits in a Bible where God commands two golden cherubim over the mercy seat, a bronze serpent to be looked at, and a temple full of carved figures, built from a plan David handed to Solomon and attributed to the Lord (1 Chronicles 28:11-19). What is forbidden is idolatry: making an image into a god, bowing down to it and serving it as God (Exodus 20:4-5). It is the worship that makes an object an idol, not the carving. Scripture even shows the line being crossed: Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent once people began burning incense to it.

We also named an honest limit. The Church does not define how the saints hear us, and we do not claim they are omniscient.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Basil the Great

Cited in the Catechism at CCC 2132

The honour rendered to an image passes to the one whom the image represents.

The Catechism draws the conclusion itself: whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On honouring the martyrs, City of God VIII.27 (summary)

Christians do not offer sacrifice to the martyrs but to God alone. The objection is not new, and neither is the answer; he is already fielding it in the fifth century.

Voice of the Church

The Second Council of Nicaea

787

The seventh ecumenical council distinguished veneration of images from the adoration due to God alone, and taught that the honour given to an image passes to its prototype.

Ready Response

“There is one mediator.” Start where you actually live. You ask people to pray for you and you have never once thought of it as competing with Christ, so say that first, in your own words, about your own week. Then offer to read the whole of 1 Timothy 2 together rather than the one verse, and let your friend see for themselves where Paul puts that sentence.

“You are consulting the dead.” Take the worry seriously; your friend is guarding something real, and saying so out loud will do more for the conversation than a rebuttal. Then tell them the thing that settled it for the group: on Christ’s own account these people are not dead. You are asking them the way you would ask your friend to pray for you, and that is the whole of what you mean by it.

“Graven images.” Rather than argue the commandment, open the same Bible beside it: Exodus 25:18, Numbers 21:8-9, 1 Kings 6:23-29, and for the plan of the temple 1 Chronicles 28:11-19. Then tell the Hezekiah story yourself, because it costs you something. God commanded that bronze serpent and it still had to be broken up once people began burning incense to it. Admitting the danger is why you will be believed about the rest.

Live It This Week

- Ask one saint, by name, to pray for the person you have been praying for.
- Read Revelation 5 and 8 and notice what heaven is doing.
- Read 2 Kings 18:4 and sit with it.

Memory Verse

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” **Hebrews 12:1**

In the Catechism

CCC 946-962, 2129-2132, 2683.