

then shall I know just as I also am known”
(1 Corinthians 13:12).

The holy Church has always held the teaching of the invocation of the saints, being fully convinced that they intercede for us before God in heaven. This we see from the ancient Liturgies. In the Liturgy of the holy Apostle James it is said: “Especially we perform the memorial of the Holy and Glorious Ever-Virgin, the Blessed Theotokos. Remember Her, O Lord God, and by Her pure and holy prayers spare and have mercy on us.” St Cyril of Jerusalem, explaining the Liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem, remarks, “Then we also commemorate (in offering the Bloodless Sacrifice) those who have previously departed: first of all, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, so that by their prayers and intercession God might receive our petition.”

Numerous are the testimonies of the Fathers and teachers of the Church, especially from the fourth century onwards, concerning the Church’s veneration of the saints. But already from the beginning of the second century there are direct indications in ancient Christian literature concerning faith in prayer by the saints in heaven for their earthly brethren. The witnesses of the martyrdom of St Ignatius the God-Bearer (at the beginning of the second century) said: “Having returned home with tears, we had the all-night vigil ... Then, after sleeping a little, some of us suddenly saw blessed Ignatius standing and embracing us, and others likewise saw him praying for us.” Similar records, mentioning the prayers and intercession for us of the martyrs, are to be found in other accounts from the epoch of persecutions against Christians.

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Communion with the Saints

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THE CHURCH PRAYS for all who have died in the faith, and asks forgiveness for their sins, for there is no man without sin, “*Even if his life is but one day upon the earth*” (Job 14:5). “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8). Therefore, no matter how righteous a man might be, when he departs from this world, the Church accompanies his departure with prayer for him to the Lord. “*Brethren, pray for us,*” the holy Apostle Paul asks his spiritual children (1 Thessalonians. 5:25).

At the same time, when the common voice of the Church testifies to the righteousness of the reposed person, Christians, apart from prayer for him, are taught by the good example of his life and place him as an example to be imitated.

And when, further, the common conviction of the sanctity of the reposed person is confirmed by special testimonies such as martyrdom, fearless confession, self-sacrificing service to the Church, and the gift of healing, and especially when the Lord confirms the sanctity of the reposed person by miracles after his death when he is remembered in prayer, then the Church *glorifies* him in a special way. How can the Church not glorify those whom the Lord Himself calls His “friends”? “*You are my friends ... I have called you friends*” (John 15:14-15), whom He has received in His heavenly mansions in fulfilment of the words, “*that where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14:3). When this happens, prayers for the forgiveness of the sins of the departed one and for his repose cease; they give way to other forms of Church communion with him, namely: first, the praising of his struggles in Christ, since he has not lit “*a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house*” (Matthew 5:15); and second, petitions to him that he might pray for us, for the remission of our sins, and for our moral advancement, and that he might help us in our spiritual needs and in our sorrows.

It is said: “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on*” (Revelation 14:13) and we indeed bless them. It is said: “*the glory which You gave Me, I have given them*” (John 17:22); and we indeed give to them this glory according to the Saviour’s commandment.

Likewise the Saviour said: “*He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s*

reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward” (Matthew 10:41). “*For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother, and sister, and mother*” (Matthew 12:50). Therefore, we also should receive a righteous man as a righteous man. If he is a brother for the Lord, then he should be such for us also. The saints are our spiritual brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers, and our love for them is expressed by communion in prayer with them.

The Apostle John wrote to his fellow Christians: “*that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3). And in the Church this fellowship with the Apostles is not interrupted; it goes over with them into the other realm of their existence, the heavenly realm.

The nearness of the saints to the Throne of the Lamb and the raising up by them of prayers for the Church on earth are depicted in the book of Revelation of St. John the Theologian: “*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand,*” who praised the Lord (Revelation 5:11).

Communion in prayer with the saints is the realization in actual fact of the bond between Christians on earth and the Heavenly Church of which the Apostle speaks: “*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect*” (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Sacred Scripture presents numerous examples of the fact that, while still living on earth, the righteous can see and hear and know much that is inaccessible to ordinary understanding. All the more these gifts are present with them when they have put off the flesh and are in heaven. The holy Apostle Peter saw into the heart of Ananias, according to the book of Acts (5:3). To Elisha was revealed the lawless act of the servant Gehazi (4 Kingdoms 4), and what is even more remarkable, to him was revealed all the secret intentions of the Syrian court, which he then communicated to the King of Israel (4 Kingdoms 6:12). When still on earth, the saints penetrated in spirit into the world above; some of them saw choirs of angels, others were vouchsafed to behold the image of God (Isaiah and Ezekiel), and still others were exalted to the third heaven and heard there mystical, unutterable words. All the more when they are in heaven are they capable of knowing what is happening on earth and of hearing those who appeal to them because the saints in heaven *are equal to the angels* (Luke 20:36).

From the parable of the Lord about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), we know that Abraham, being in heaven, could hear the cry of the rich man who was suffering in hell, despite the “*great gulf*” that separates them. The words of Abraham about the rich man’s brethren, “*They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them*” (Luke 16:29), clearly indicate that Abraham knows the life of the Hebrew people which has occurred after his death; he knows of Moses and the Law, of the prophets and their writings. The spiritual vision of the souls of the righteous in heaven, without any doubt, is greater than it was on earth. The Apostle writes: “*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but*