

“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of as a memorial to her.” (Mk 14:9)

✠ Lecture VI: On the Saints' Intercession & Veneration ✠

In Lecture II of Mariology, we presented, by the grace of God, the Orthodox Concept of intercession. However, we need to highlight the fact that in honoring the saints and angels we do not put them in the place of Lord Jesus Christ or even adjacent to Him. No one except Lord Jesus Christ is able to save man from sin thus when the saints pray for us, it is our salvation that they seek from the Lord. They intercede with Him for our salvation. From the Lord they entreat our salvation – not, however, as if they themselves have the power to save, for the only one who saves is Lord Jesus Christ.

✠ Biblical Examples of Intercession:

- (Gen 20:1-7) → Abimelech King of Gerar took Sarah to his palace because our father Abraham said that she was his sister. However God rebuked him and ordered him to restore Sarah to her husband and said to him, “...he [Abraham] will pray for you and you shall live” (Gen 20:7).
- (Job 42:7,8) → God made the prayer of Job the Righteous on behalf of the three friends a condition for their forgiveness.
- (Gen 18:26-32) → God said to our father Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom “for the sake” of even 10 righteous people.
- (Jer 5:1) → It is written that God is ready to pardon Jerusalem for the sake of one righteous person.
- (Ex 32:7-14) → We read about Moses the Prophet interceding on behalf of the People with God.

→ Thus we conclude that God Himself encourages and accepts intercession. However, someone may protest and say that the above holy verses are examples of intercession of people who are still alive. Therefore, we shall mention more biblical examples about the intercession of saints who have already departed:

- (Ex 32:13) → Moses the Prophet is asking God to act for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.
- (1 Kg 11:12,13) → God declares that He will not tear the kingdom away in the days of King Solomon “for the sake” of his father David the Prophet who had already departed.
- (Jer 15:1) → God, wanting to illustrate how severe His wrath towards the people, said, “Even if Moses and Samuel [who had already departed] stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people.” – This shows that the principle of intercession does exist.

✠ God Honors His Saints:

God honors His saints by giving them extraordinary powers and gifts. For instance we read that the dead bones of Elisha the Prophet raised the dead (2 Kg 13:21) and the handkerchiefs or aprons of St. Paul healed the sick and cast out demons (Acts 19:12) while the shadow of St. Peter healed the sick (Acts 5:15). Therefore, Elijah the Prophet said with confidence, “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.” (1 Kg 17:1) – Our Lord said, “If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.” (Jn 12:26)

→ Thus, since God Himself has honored His saints, and accepted their intercessions, we are not mistaken if we honor them and ask for their prayer, blessings and intercession.

Q1: Do the saints who departed and the angels know what happens on earth?

A1: Our Lord said, “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Lk 15:10) – Thus the angels know and also react to what happens on earth. Moreover, our Lord said that the saints who depart would be like “angels of God in heaven.” (Mt 22:30) Therefore we read about the souls of the martyrs that they knew that God had not avenged their blood yet (Rev 6:10). Also our father Abraham knew that the rich man had received his good things in his life time and that Lazarus evil things (Lk 16:25) he also knew about Moses and the prophets. St. Paul said, “Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (1 Cor 13:12)

Q2: Why are the Orthodox Churches named after saints aren't they God's Churches?

A2: Indeed they are. However, naming the house of God after the saints does not mean that they share God's Glory. For instance, God's temple was called after King Solomon and God's Law was called the "Law of Moses" (**Mal 4:4**) also the inspired Holy Scriptures are God's words yet we read "the words of Jeremiah" (**Jer 1:1**) and "the vision of Isaiah" (**Is 1:1**) – Moreover, we read about the heavenly Jerusalem, "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were **the names of the twelve apostles** of the Lamb." (**Rev 21:14**) Also, God called Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (**Ex 3:6; 4:5; Mt 22:32**)

Q3: Is the veneration of the saints' relics border on idolatry?

A3: The holy relics are neither idols nor deities, nor figures of God, and their veneration is not idol worship. For inasmuch as God has glorified them, giving them miraculous power, so too should we venerate them, for this way we honor God, who bestowed His grace on them (**2 Kg 13:21**). – These relics were the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 6:19**) and thus we are not honoring the bones themselves, but the divine grace bestowed on them.

✚ **A Final Word:**

The interaction between the heavenly hosts (saints & angels) and the Church in this world is a practical reality that we experience and thus is not really subject to theological debate and philosophical arguments. Those who deny this reality are the ones who lose the blessings.

* This lecture is adapted from '*Comparative Theology*' by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.