

Ask Fr James

What are the different levels of veneration and adoration in the Catholic Church?

The traditional Catholic practice of veneration of the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary, is problematic for some Catholics and remains a barrier in dialogue with many Protestants. For these Protestants, popular Marian devotions and images and pilgrimages to Marian shrines is idolatry and the skeptical Catholics wonder how the dead (saints) can do such great things.

The Catholic doctrine of veneration of the saints (cult of the saints) gained prominence when Catholic started to reflect on the expression “I believe in the communion of saints” in the Apostles’ Creed. Saints were honored for their godly acts and revered for their examples of godly Christian behavior while on earth. Now, as citizens of heaven, their proximity to Christ assures of their continued prayer for mankind and concrete intercession on behalf of sinners.

Thus, in the Catholic Church, we make 3 distinctions about veneration and adoration of heavenly beings: Divine adoration, adoration of created supernatural and adoration of created natural. In this order, there are three corresponding forms of adoration and veneration:

1. The adoration of God; known as latria (the church's Latin term for such homage was latria).
2. The simple respect and veneration and adoration of angels and saints; called dulia.
3. The adoration due to the Blessed Virgin Mary is known as hyperdulia.

The church recognizes the risk of impropriety and the presumption that images, even if not used directly in worship, risked distracting the worshipper from God or, worse, suggesting that God could be worshipped indirectly through his representatives. This led the Second Council of Nicaea as early as 787 AD to distinguish between latria (worship due to God alone) and dulia (reverence paid to lesser creatures).

The Catholic Church doctrine teaches that adoration and veneration may be either latria, dulia or hyperdulia. That means worship, adoration and veneration are ordered in this descending order: God, Jesus Christ, Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels, the Apostles, the Saints and Souls in purgatory who are also still able to pray for us; like we ask them to do for us on all souls day on November 1st and 2nd every year.

However, supreme and absolute worship (latria) is due to God alone and to Christ our Lord. This is how come we can bow to and worship the cross and images of Christ. A lesser form of veneration due to the angels and the saints and their relics and images is called dulia. A special form of veneration is due to the mother of God and this relative form of veneration can also be offered to her relics and images (hyperdulia).

The veneration of saints (dulia) is identified by the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, as predicated on them being companion, model, and intercessor for us humans. Dulia of the saints and latria of God are united. When we deliberately love the saints in consciousness of their reflection and mediation of God’s love, we engage in a religious act of free human response to God. Between God and the human person then, there ‘is a distance that belongs to nature. Only when grace is imparted to us is the distance between God and creature given the power to transform that distance into a genuine and fruitful conversation between God and faith.

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.