

SUPPLEMENT TO THE THIRD PART, QUESTION 72

Of Prayers with Regard to the Saints in Heaven (In Three Articles)

We must now consider prayer with regard to the saints in heaven. Under this head there are three points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether the saints have knowledge of our prayers?
- (2) Whether we should beseech them to pray for us?
- (3) Whether the prayers they pour forth for us are always granted?

Whether the saints have knowledge of our prayers?

Suppl. q. 72 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that the saints have no knowledge of our prayers. For a gloss on Is. 62:16, “Thou art our father and Abraham hath not known us, and Israel hath been ignorant of us,” says that “the dead saints know not what the living, even their own children, are doing.” This is taken from Augustine (De Cura pro Mort. xiii), where he quotes the aforesaid authority, and the following are his words: “If such great men as the patriarchs knew not what was happening to the people begotten of them, how can the dead occupy themselves in watching and helping the affairs and actions of the living?” Therefore the saints cannot be cognizant of our prayers.

Objection 2. Further, the following words are addressed to King Joas (4 Kings 22:20): “Therefore” (i.e. because thou hast wept before Me), “I will gather thee to thy fathers. . . that thy eyes may not see all the evils which I will bring upon this place.” But Joas would have gained no such advantage from his death if he were to know after death what was happening to his people. Therefore the saints after death know not our actions, and thus they are not cognizant of our prayers.

Objection 3. Further, the more perfect a man is in charity, the more he succors his neighbor when the latter is in danger. Now the saints, in this life, watch over their neighbor, especially their kinsfolk, when these are in danger, and manifestly assist them. Since then, after death, their charity is much greater, if they were cognizant of our deeds, much more would they watch over their friends and kindred and assist them in their needs: and yet, seemingly, they do not. Therefore it would seem that our deeds and prayers are not known to them.

Objection 4. Further, even as the saints after death see the Word, so do the angels of whom it is stated (Mat. 18:10) that “their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father.” Yet the angels through seeing the Word do not therefore know all things, since the lower angels are cleansed from their lack of knowledge by the higher angels*, as Dionysius declares (Coel. Hier. vii). Therefore although the saints see the Word, they do not see therein our prayers and other things that happen in our regard.

Objection 5. Further, God alone is the searcher of

hearts. Now prayer is seated chiefly in the heart. Therefore it belongs to God alone to know our prayers. Therefore our prayers are unknown to the saints.

On the contrary, Gregory, commenting on Job 14:21, “Whether his children come to honor or dishonor, he shall not understand,” says (Moral. xii): “This does not apply to the souls of the saints, for since they have an insight of Almighty God’s glory we must not believe that anything outside that glory is unknown to them.” Therefore they are cognizant of our prayers. Further, Gregory says (Dial. ii): “All creatures are little to the soul that sees God: because however little it sees of the Creator’s light, every created thing appears foreshortened to it.” Now apparently the chief obstacle to the souls of the saints being cognizant of our prayers and other happenings in our regard is that they are far removed from us. Since then distance does not prevent these things, as appears from the authority quoted, it would seem that the souls of the saints are cognizant of our prayers and of what happens here below.

Further, unless they were aware of what happens in our regard they would not pray for us, since they would be ignorant of our needs. But this is the error of Vigilantius, as Jerome asserts in his letter against him. Therefore the saints are cognizant of what happens in our regard.

I answer that, The Divine essence is a sufficient medium for knowing all things, and this is evident from the fact that God, by seeing His essence, sees all things. But it does not follow that whoever sees God’s essence knows all things, but only those who comprehend the essence of God[†]: even as the knowledge of a principle does not involve the knowledge of all that follows from that principle unless the whole virtue of the principle be comprehended. Wherefore, since the souls of the saints do not comprehend the Divine essence, it does not follow that they know all that can be known by the Divine essence—for which reason the lower angels are taught concerning certain matters by the higher angels, though they all see the essence of God; but each of the blessed must needs see in the Divine essence as many other things as the perfection of his happiness requires. For the perfection of a man’s happiness requires him to

* Cf. Ia, q. 106, a. 1 † Cf. Ia, q. 12, Aa. 7,8

have whatever he will, and to will nothing amiss: and each one wills with a right will, to know what concerns himself. Hence since no rectitude is lacking to the saints, they wish to know what concerns themselves, and consequently it follows that they know it in the Word. Now it pertains to their glory that they assist the needy for their salvation: for thus they become God's co-operators, "than which nothing is more Godlike," as Dionysius declares (Coel. Hier. iii). Wherefore it is evident that the saints are cognizant of such things as are required for this purpose; and so it is manifest that they know in the Word the vows, devotions, and prayers of those who have recourse to their assistance.

Reply to Objection 1. The saying of Augustine is to be understood as referring to the natural knowledge of separated souls, which knowledge is devoid of obscurity in holy men. But he is not speaking of their knowledge in the Word, for it is clear that when Isaias said this, Abraham had no such knowledge, since no one had come to the vision of God before Christ's passion.

Reply to Objection 2. Although the saints, after this life, know what happens here below, we must not believe that they grieve through knowing the woes of those whom they loved in this world: for they are so filled with heavenly joy, that sorrow finds no place in

them. Wherefore if after death they know the woes of their friends, their grief is forestalled by their removal from this world before their woes occur. Perhaps, however, the non-glorified souls would grieve somewhat, if they were aware of the distress of their dear ones: and since the soul of Josias was not glorified as soon as it went out from his body, it is in this respect that Augustine uses this argument to show that the souls of the dead have no knowledge of the deeds of the living.

Reply to Objection 3. The souls of the saints have their will fully conformed to the Divine will even as regards the things willed. and consequently, although they retain the love of charity towards their neighbor, they do not succor him otherwise than they see to be in conformity with the disposition of Divine justice. Nevertheless, it is to be believed that they help their neighbor very much by interceding for him to God.

Reply to Objection 4. Although it does not follow that those who see the Word see all things in the Word, they see those things that pertain to the perfection of their happiness, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 5. God alone of Himself knows the thoughts of the heart: yet others know them, in so far as these are revealed to them, either by their vision of the Word or by any other means.

Whether we ought to call upon the saints to pray for us?

Suppl. q. 72 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that we ought not to call upon the saints to pray for us. For no man asks anyone's friends to pray for him, except in so far as he believes he will more easily find favor with them. But God is infinitely more merciful than any saint, and consequently His will is more easily inclined to give us a gracious hearing, than the will of a saint. Therefore it would seem unnecessary to make the saints mediators between us and God, that they may intercede for us.

Objection 2. Further, if we ought to beseech them to pray for us, this is only because we know their prayer to be acceptable to God. Now among the saints the holier a man is, the more is his prayer acceptable to God. Therefore we ought always to bespeak the greater saints to intercede for us with God, and never the lesser ones.

Objection 3. Further, Christ, even as man, is called the "Holy of Holies," and, as man, it is competent to Him to pray. Yet we never call upon Christ to pray for us. Therefore neither should we ask the other saints to do so.

Objection 4. Further, whenever one person intercedes for another at the latter's request, he presents his petition to the one with whom he intercedes for him. Now it is unnecessary to present anything to one to whom all things are present. Therefore it is unnecessary to make the saints our intercessors with God.

Objection 5. Further, it is unnecessary to do a thing

if, without doing it, the purpose for which it is done would be achieved in the same way, or else not achieved at all. Now the saints would pray for us just the same, or would not pray for us at all, whether we pray to them or not: for if we be worthy of their prayers, they would pray for us even though we prayed not to them, while if we be unworthy they pray not for us even though we ask them to. Therefore it seems altogether unnecessary to call on them to pray for us.

On the contrary, It is written (Job 5:1): "Call. . . if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints." Now, as Gregory says (Moral. v, 30) on this passage, "we call upon God when we beseech Him in humble prayer." Therefore when we wish to pray God, we should turn to the saints, that they may pray God for us.

Further, the saints who are in heaven are more acceptable to God than those who are on the way. Now we should make the saints, who are on the way, our intercessors with God, after the example of the Apostle, who said (Rom. 15:30): "I beseech you. . . brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the charity of the Holy Ghost, that you help me in your prayers for me to God." Much more, therefore, should we ask the saints who are in heaven to help us by their prayers to God.

Further, an additional argument is provided by the common custom of the Church which asks for the prayers of the saints in the Litany.

I answer that, According to Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. v) the order established by God among things is that “the last should be led to God by those that are mid-way between.” Wherefore, since the saints who are in heaven are nearest to God, the order of the Divine law requires that we, who while we remain in the body are pilgrims from the Lord, should be brought back to God by the saints who are between us and Him: and this happens when the Divine goodness pours forth its effect into us through them. And since our return to God should correspond to the outflow of His boons upon us, just as the Divine favors reach us by means of the saints intercession, so should we, by their means, be brought back to God, that we may receive His favors again. Hence it is that we make them our intercessors with God, and our mediators as it were, when we ask them to pray for us.

Reply to Objection 1. It is not on account of any defect in God’s power that He works by means of second causes, but it is for the perfection of the order of the universe, and the more manifold outpouring of His goodness on things, through His bestowing on them not only the goodness which is proper to them, but also the faculty of causing goodness in others. Even so it is not through any defect in His mercy, that we need to bespeak His clemency through the prayers of the saints, but to the end that the aforesaid order in things be observed.

Reply to Objection 2. Although the greater saints are more acceptable to God than the lesser, it is sometimes profitable to pray to the lesser; and this for five reasons. First, because sometimes one has greater devotion for a lesser saint than for a greater, and the effect

of prayer depends very much on one’s devotion. Secondly, in order to avoid tediousness, for continual attention to one thing makes a person weary; whereas by praying to different saints, the fervor of our devotion is aroused anew as it were. Thirdly, because it is granted to some saints to exercise their patronage in certain special cases, for instance to Saint Anthony against the fire of hell. Fourthly, that due honor be given by us to all. Fifthly, because the prayers of several sometimes obtain that which would not have been obtained by the prayers of one.

Reply to Objection 3. Prayer is an act, and acts belong to particular persons [supposita]. Hence, were we to say: “Christ, pray for us,” except we added something, this would seem to refer to Christ’s person, and consequently to agree with the error either of Nestorius, who distinguished in Christ the person of the son of man from the person of the Son of God, or of Arius, who asserted that the person of the Son is less than the Father. Wherefore to avoid these errors the Church says not: “Christ, pray for us,” but “Christ, hear us,” or “have mercy on us.”

Reply to Objection 4. As we shall state further on (a. 3) the saints are said to present our prayers to God, not as though they notified things unknown to Him, but because they ask God to grant those prayers a gracious hearing, or because they seek the Divine truth about them, namely what ought to be done according to His providence.

Reply to Objection 5. A person is rendered worthy of a saint’s prayers for him by the very fact that in his need he has recourse to him with pure devotion. Hence it is not unnecessary to pray to the saints.

Whether the prayers which the saints pour forth to God for us are always granted?

Suppl. q. 72 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that the prayers which the saints pour forth to God for us are not always granted. For if they were always granted, the saints would be heard especially in regard to matters concerning themselves. But they are not heard in reference to these things; wherefore it is stated in the Apocalypse (6:11) that on the martyrs beseeching vengeance on them that dwell on earth, “it was said to them that they should rest for a little while till the number of their brethren should be filled up*.” Much less therefore, are they heard in reference to matters concerning others.

Objection 2. Further, it is written (Jer. 15:1): “If Moses and Samuel shall stand before Me, My soul is not towards this people.” Therefore, the saints are not always heard when they pray God for us.

Objection 3. Further, the saints in heaven are stated to be equal to the angels of God (Mat. 22:30). But the angels are not always heard in the prayers which they offer up to God. This is evident from Dan. 10:12,13, where it is written: “I am come for thy words: but the

prince of the kingdom of the Persians resisted me one-and-twenty days.” But the angel who spoke had not come to Daniel’s aid except by asking of God to be set free; and yet the fulfillment of his prayer was hindered. Therefore neither are other saints always heard by God when they pray for us.

Objection 4. Further, whosoever obtains something by prayer merits it in a sense. But the saints in heaven are not in the state of meriting. Therefore they cannot obtain anything for us from God by their prayers.

Objection 5. Further, the saints, in all things, conform their will to the will of God. Therefore they will nothing but what they know God to will. But no one prays save for what he wills. Therefore they pray not save for what they know God to will. Now that which God wills would be done even without their praying for it. Therefore their prayers are not efficacious for obtaining anything.

Objection 6. Further, the prayers of the whole heavenly court, if they could obtain anything, would be more

* Vulg.: ‘till their fellow-servants and their brethren...should be filled up’

efficacious than all the petitions of the Church here below. Now if the suffrages of the Church here below for some one in purgatory were to be multiplied, he would be wholly delivered from punishment. Since then the saints in heaven pray for those who are in purgatory on the same account as for us, if they obtain anything for us, their prayers would deliver entirely from punishment those who are in purgatory. But this is not true because, then the Church's suffrages for the dead would be unnecessary.

On the contrary, It is written (2 Macc. 15:14): "This is he that prayeth much for the people, and for all the holy city, Jeremias the prophet of God": and that his prayer was granted is clear from what follows (2 Macc. 15:15): "Jeremias stretched forth his right hand, and gave to Judas a sword of gold, saying: Take this holy sword, a gift from God," etc.

Further, Jerome says (Ep. contra Vigilant.): "Thou sayest in thy pamphlets, that while we live, we can pray for one another, but that when we are dead no one's prayer for another will be heard": and afterwards he refutes this in the following words: "If the apostles and martyrs while yet in the body can pray for others, while they are still solicitous for themselves, how much more can they do so when the crown, the victory, the triumph is already theirs!"

Further, this is confirmed by the custom of the Church, which often asks to be assisted by the prayers of the saints.

I answer that, The saints are said to pray for us in two ways. First, by "express" prayer, when by their prayers they seek a hearing of the Divine clemency on our behalf: secondly, by "interpretive" prayer, namely by their merits which, being known to God, avail not only them unto glory, but also us as suffrages and prayers, even as the shedding of Christ's blood is said to ask pardon for us. In both ways the saints' prayers considered in themselves avail to obtain what they ask, yet on our part they may fail so that we obtain not the fruit of their prayers, in so far as they are said to pray for us by reason of their merits availing on our behalf. But in so far as they pray for us by asking something for us in their prayers, their prayers are always granted, since they will only what God wills, nor do they ask save for what they will to be done; and what God wills is always fulfilled—unless we speak of His "antecedent" will, whereby "He wishes all men to be saved"*. For this will is not always fulfilled; wherefore no wonder if that also which the saints will according to this kind of will be not fulfilled sometimes.

Reply to Objection 1. This prayer of the martyrs is merely their desire to obtain the robe of the body and the fellowship of those who will be saved, and their consent to God's justice in punishing the wicked. Hence a gloss on Apoc. 6:11, "How long, O Lord," says: "They desire an increase of joy and the fellowship of the saints, and they consent to God's justice."

Reply to Objection 2. The Lord speaks there of Moses and Samuel according to their state in this life. For we read that they withstood God's anger by praying for the people. And yet even if they had been living at the time in question, they would have been unable to placate God towards the people by their prayers, on account of the wickedness of this same people: and it is thus that we are to understand this passage.

Reply to Objection 3. This dispute among the good angels does not mean that they offered contradictory prayers to God, but that they submitted contrary merits on various sides to the Divine inquiry, with a view of God's pronouncing sentence thereon. This, in fact, is what Gregory says (Moral. xvii) in explanation of the aforesaid words of Daniel: "The lofty spirits that are set over the nations never fight in behalf of those that act unjustly, but they justly judge and try their deeds. And when the guilt or innocence of any particular nation is brought into the debate of the court above, the ruling spirit of that nation is said to have won or lost in the conflict. Yet the supreme will of their Maker is victorious over all, for since they have it ever before their eyes, they will not what they are unable to obtain," wherefore neither do they seek for it. And consequently it is clear that their prayers are always heard.

Reply to Objection 4. Although the saints are not in a state to merit for themselves, when once they are in heaven, they are in a state to merit for others, or rather to assist others by reason of their previous merit: for while living they merited that their prayers should be heard after their death.

Or we may reply that prayer is meritorious on one count, and impetratory on another. For merit consists in a certain equation of the act to the end for which it is intended, and which is given to it as its reward; while the impetration of a prayer depends on the liberality of the person supplicated. Hence prayer sometimes, through the liberality of the person supplicated, obtains that which was not merited either by the suppliant, or by the person supplicated for: and so, although the saints are not in the state of meriting, it does not follow that they are not in the state of impetrating.

Reply to Objection 5. As appears from the authority of Gregory quoted above (ad 3), the saints and angels will nothing but what they see to be in the Divine will: and so neither do they pray for aught else. Nor is their prayer fruitless, since as Augustine says (De Praed. Sanct.†): "The prayers of the saints profit the predestinate, because it is perhaps pre-ordained that they shall be saved through the prayers of those who intercede for them": and consequently God also wills that what the saints see Him to will shall be fulfilled through their prayers.

Reply to Objection 6. The suffrages of the Church for the dead are as so many satisfactions of the living in lieu of the dead: and accordingly they free the dead from the punishment which the latter have not paid. But

* Cf. Ia, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1 † De Dono Persever. xxii

the saints in heaven are not in the state of making satisfaction; and consequently the parallel fails between their prayers and the suffrages of the Church.