

# DID YOU KNOW?

## DID YOU KNOW? CATHOLICS DO NOT WORSHIP MARY

This is, arguably, one of the most common misconceptions held about the Catholic Faith: That Catholics worship Mary. Catholics, of course, do not worship Mary. First, we must understand the difference between worship and prayer. Worship, in its truest sense, is adoration (or *latria*) and given to God alone. Prayer, on the other hand, is a form of conversation and communication. In prayer, we can turn to God and to all those in union with Him. We adore God alone, but we can also give honor to and have a devotion for those who are now with Him in Heaven.

In prayer to Mary (*and the Saints*), we do not bypass Jesus Christ. Instead, we go to Him through Mary (*and the Saints*), asking them in our prayer, or conversation, to bring our intentions before the throne of Jesus in Heaven. Why do we ask Mary and the Saints to do this (*in the same way that we ask loved ones to pray for us*)? Because, as St. James reminds us: “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful.” (James 5:16). And, like St. Paul, we are not afraid to ask our fellow Christians to intercede for us (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Romans 15:30).

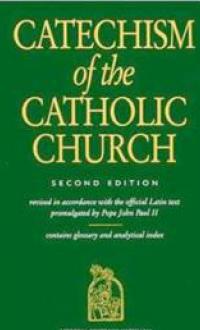
Turning to history, we do not immediately find the topic of prayer directed to the Blessed Mother discussed in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. Instead, addressing the controversies of their day, they are writing about and championing Mary’s perpetual virginity and her role as Mother of God, or *Theotokos*. To find her role as a prayerful intercessor in the early Church, we instead, quite appropriately, turn to the prayers of the Church.

The oldest recorded Marian prayer, the *Sub tuum praesidium*, dates back to at least 250 AD. Still prayed today, it’s origins are believed to be from an ancient prayer that was used in the Church’s Christmas Liturgy throughout Egypt. This is but one example of a multitude of hymns, canticles, and prayers composed throughout the ages that attest to the Church’s ancient practice of seeking intercession to Jesus through Mary.

As we have seen, Catholics do not worship Mary. Prayer to Mary is not worship, which is given to God alone. Instead, prayer is a spiritual communication of love and petition to the Mother of Jesus, who continues to care for the Mystical Body of her Son by her intercession.

## “All generations will call me blessed”

LUKE 1:48



“The Church rightly honors ‘the Blessed Virgin’ with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of ‘Mother of God,’ to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs. This very special devotion differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration.”

~Catechism of the Catholic Church, Para. 971

As the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary is eternally close to her son, and she is, therefore, the greatest intercessor in prayer. As St. James tells us, “the prayer of a righteous person has great power” (James 5:16).



Mary and the Saints are not dead, for God “is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him” (Luke 20:38). And, they, as members of Jesus’ body (1 Corinthians 12:27), are able to intercede for us before His throne in Heaven. When we are united in the Body of Jesus Christ, nothing, not even death, can separate us (Romans 8:38-39).

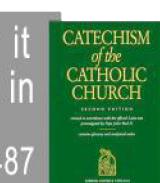
As the Scriptures call us to ask others to pray for us, we ask our family on both Heaven and earth to intercede for us before God. For we are one in the Body of Christ. In this way, our prayer through Mary and the Saints help point us right to Jesus.

“What the Catholic Faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illuminates in turn its faith in Christ.”

~Catechism of the Catholic Church, Para. 487

“Beneath thy compassion, we take refuge, O Mother of God: do not despise our petitions in time of trouble, but rescue us from dangers, only pure one, only blessed one.”

(The earliest known written Marian prayer, dated to 250 AD)



~*Sub tuum praesidium*

are united in Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

Why do we turn to Mary in this way? Because Mary, as proclaimed by the Sacred Scriptures, is called “blessed” by all generations (Luke 1:42, 48). And, as St. James reminds us, “the prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (James 5:16). We do not worship Mary, for worship is given to God alone. Instead, we turn to Mary, the Mother of our Lord and our Mother (John 19:26-27), in prayer, entering into a spiritual conversation with her who will always point us to her Son, Jesus Christ.

In prayer to Mary, we ask her to intercede for us before the throne of her Son (just as we might ask any of our family members to pray for us.) Mary’s intercession is completely subordinate to, and dependent upon, Jesus’ intercession. Our prayer, then, is offered to Jesus through Mary.

Ask a ? at [www.StJosephChurchBluffton.org/ask](http://www.StJosephChurchBluffton.org/ask)  
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## INTRODUCTION TO MARY

“We Catholics cherish our Marian beliefs. We recognize that the privileges God gave the Blessed Virgin Mary are gifts for the whole human race. We believe our Marian doctrines are based solidly on public revelation. We also see our many beautiful Marian devotions as a practical way of living out what Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition teach about our Blessed Mother.

However, for many non-Catholics Mary is a huge stumbling block. They think Catholics ‘make too much of Mary,’ that we give her too much attention, taking away from the honor we owe to Christ. As one anti-Catholic writer put it: This most blessed of women, the mother of Jesus, is thus made His chief rival and competitor for the loyalty and devotion of the human heart.

As evangelists, it’s our job to show non-Catholics that Mary and Jesus are not in competition, but are members of the same team. We must share the obvious truth that Mary is the first and best Christian who only leads us closer to her Son, Jesus. We must assure them that Mary’s privileges come exclusively from God and reflect His love and mercy. Finally, we must invite them to discover how Mary’s role in salvation is taught from Genesis to Revelation and she is, by God’s design, the spiritual mother of all Christians.”

Beginning Apologetics, Vol. 6  
How to Explain & Defend Mary

“The world being unworthy to receive the Son of God directly from the hands of the Father, he gave his Son to Mary for the world to receive him from her.”

St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430)