

In college, once I had come to believe and know that the Catholic Church had the fullness of faith, I would often get into theological discussions with Protestants

One of the many questions that came up was why we Catholics pray to the saints

Often they bring up Deuteronomy 18:10-11, which says, "Let there not be found among you anyone who immolates his son or daughter in the fire, nor a fortune-teller, soothsayer, charmer, diviner, or caster of spells, nor one who consults ghosts and spirits or seeks oracles from the dead"

Protestants are especially concerned about the part of consulting ghosts or spirits or seeking oracles from the dead

So I would then ask them if they ever ask their friends to pray for them - of course they say yes

Then I would say, "Jesus said in Mark 12:27 that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"

As Catholics we believe the Church is made up of the Church militant here on earth, the Church Penitent (which are the souls in Purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (the souls in heaven) - we are all one big Church - we are all one big Body of Christ

We see this in action, when at the Transfiguration, Jesus talks to Moses and Elijah, prophets from the Old Testament - who had not lived on earth for hundreds of years

Are you going to tell me that God somehow disobeyed the law He gave to the Israelites hundreds of years before, that He would somehow disobey Himself? I don't think so

Moses and Elijah are very much alive in God if Jesus is able to talk to them

What Deuteronomy is saying is not to pray to evil spirits or demons - these are opposed to God and aligned with Satan - they are spiritually dead

So just as the example of Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah shows us, the different parts of the Church, the Body of Christ, can pray for each other - just as we would ask a friend to pray for us - or maybe how we would start a prayer chain - I know there is one here at Sacred Heart - so if you ever need some extra prayers, call the office and they'll get the prayer chain started for your prayer intention

So the different parts of the body of Christ can pray for each other - with a few exceptions - the Church Triumphant, the souls in heaven do not need any prayers because they are already in heaven - the Church Penitent, the souls in Purgatory, are guaranteed to get to heaven eventually, but first they need to be purified, to be made perfect as Jesus asks us to be - "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)

The souls in Purgatory can't pray for themselves, but instead they have to rely on the prayers of others - that is why it is so important that at funerals and Masses we pray for the dead just in case their souls are in Purgatory and haven't made it to heaven yet

It is true though, that the souls in Purgatory, even though they can't pray for themselves, can still pray for others, even us

So, as I like to tell the kids, the saints in heaven don't have to worry about taking time to eat, go to the bathroom, go to school, or whatever else our friends do - so when we ask the saints to pray, to intercede on our behalf, they can

petition God on our behalf all the time - plus they are in heaven - they are right next to God - so their prayers are even more powerful than our friends' prayers here on earth

So it is a very good idea to ask for the intercession of the saints in our prayers, even a better idea than asking our friends to pray for us - so if you need something, ask your friends, but even more importantly, ask the saints to pray for you
We are the One Body of Christ; we are one community - because of God's grace, we can help each other in supernatural ways

We see that powerfully illustrated in today's Gospel

Another thing some of our Protestant brothers and sisters will say is that we need to accept Christ as our personal Lord and Savior - now there is some truth to this idea, but look at today's Gospel

Mark records that Jesus healed the paralytic not because of the paralytic's faith, but because of the faith of the paralytic's friends - "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven'"

Do you see that?! Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins and heals him not because of his faith, but the faith of his friends
It is the paralytic's friends' faith that allows Jesus to forgive his sins and heal him; not his own personal faith

We too can intercede for each other - we too, by the pure gift of God, can help bring Christ's healing grace to others to heal them spiritually and sometimes physically

I think we kind of naturally know this - we do have a habit of asking friends to pray for us - but sometimes I think we make the request to our friends half-heartedly

Do we really believe and know that our prayers, by God's grace, can really make a difference in someone else's life?

I was visiting someone in the hospital this past week - I told her that she could help people - she asked how since she was in the hospital and couldn't do a whole lot- I told her, pray for people, offer up your suffering and pain for the salvation of others, for the conversion of souls, whatever else is on your heart

No matter what our situation is, if the only thing we can do is pray and unite our suffering to Christ's suffering on the Cross, it is probably then that we are more powerful than we have ever been - it is when we are meek and humble that God's power can most easily shine through

All of what I'm talking about is possible because we really are One Body in Christ, with Christ as the Head

And starting with Peter, the pope is Christ's representative on earth

Our bishops are descendants of the Apostles in that our bishop was appointed by a bishop who was appointed by a bishop who was appointed by a bishop and so on all the way back to one of the twelve Apostles - this is called Apostolic Succession

Our Catholic community is so much bigger than just Sacred Heart, or Owatonna, or MN, or America - Catholic means universal - world wide

Some of you have had this experience too - of going to Mass in another country - you may not know what is being said, but you know exactly what is going on because the Mass is the same no matter where you are in the world

It is such an awesome experience to see and know that people all over the world are worshiping the same way we do week in and week out

The Catholic Church really is universal, it really is world wide - all of us, the world over, along with the Church Penitent and the Church Triumphant, make up the One Body of Christ

Therefore, it is only right that we be willing to share the gifts God has given us with the rest of the Body of Christ

We need to share with others and intercede for others with our God-given time, talent, and treasure

It is that time of year again - the Annual Diocesan Appeal

The Annual Diocesan Appeal is just one of many ways that God may be calling us to unite ourselves to the universal Catholic Church...not just the parish or parishes in Owatonna

So I invite you to take the envelopes that are in your pews home and to pray and discern how God is asking you to sacrifice and give so that the universal Body of Christ can better spread the Good News of Christ's healing and forgiving sins

Just like the friends of the paralytic, we must push away all obstacles, break open a roof if you need to, to help each other get to Christ