

The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an ‘epitome of the whole Gospel,’ express this devotion to the Virgin Mary” (§971).

The Decalogue commands that we honor our fathers and mothers. Jesus would have fulfilled this commandment, in reference to Mary - perfectly; He could do no less. Catholics simply ask Mary, in prayer, to present our petitions to her Son. Certainly, we can go directly to Jesus with our requests, but what loving son would refuse his mother any request within his power to grant?

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Pamphlet 380

The Worship of Mary

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A number of years ago I ran across a book with the intriguing title of “Saint Worship – The Worship of Mary” by Orestes A. Brownson (recently republished by Sophia Institute Press). Brownson (1803-1878) spent the first forty years of his life in a maze of religious affiliations, which included Presbyterianism, Universalism, Unitarianism and the sect of Humanity. These were interrupted by a period when he gave up Christianity altogether. After an experiment with a church of his own which he called “The Church of the Future” he finally oriented his thinking and became a Catholic, and a zealous one. He is buried in the chapel at Notre Dame University.

In his book, Brownson used the word “Worship” not in the strict sense of homage paid to God alone, but in its wide sense of reverence given to one who deserves honor. He used the word because he could find no other in the English language to precisely convey the meaning he had in mind.

Worship denotes a kind of honor, which in turn is a sign of esteem given a person for his excellence. But in religious matters, worship adds to honor or esteem the sense of one's own inferiority and subjection with respect to the person honored. Since God is the Supreme Being and the Absolute Lord of the universe, to him is due worship in the highest degree. The technical name for the

worship of God is adoration or *latreutic* worship (from the ancient Greek word *latreia*, which meant the service given to the gods). The lesser form of veneration given to the angels and saints that Catholicism recognizes has the theological name of *dulia* (from the Greek term *douleia*, which means the respect shown to a master by his servant). The Blessed Virgin is said to be honored with *hyperdulia*, i.e., a higher form of what is essentially the same veneration paid to other creatures among the saints but in essence unlike the adoration given only to God.

We adore God because of His infinite uncreated excellence (Latria); we venerate Our Lady (Hyperdulia) and the saints (Dulia) because of the manifestation of God's excellence in them. No person or thing should take the place of God, or be honored in a manner due to God alone, for this is idolatry, which God forbade. All worship not directed to God Himself must be subordinate to Him (Ex. 20:3-5; Deut. 5:9; John 4:22).

Brownson demonstrated that the veneration Catholics pay to the saints is not based on emotionalism and sentimentality, but on sound theological reason and pure common sense. When we honor the saints, we honor God because they are the jewels of His creation. And when we honor the Blessed Virgin, we are honoring the Queen of all saints.

Today, there is much misunderstanding, outside the Catholic Church, concerning the Catholic practice of honoring Mary and the saints.

Let me make it clear that ***the Catholic Church literally condemns as idolatry, the worship of anything or anyone other than God in the form of the Trinity.***

The word in the Bible for “saint” or “saints” is the Greek word “*hagios*” also translated “sanctified” or “holy ones.” The root word “*hazo*,” means “to venerate.” *Hagios* means to be separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God.

Why should we honor the saints? The answer is straightforward, because God did! God provided the necessary grace, through faith, to enable these men and women to live lives of heroic sanctity. If God honored the saints, shouldn't we do the same?

God honored Mary in a very special way by choosing her, among all His creatures to be the Mother of His Incarnation.

If you were God (Jesus) and had the ability to create your own mother, would you allow blemishes, either physical or spiritual, or would you make her perfect in every way? Holy Scripture is very clear that nothing profane can come into contact with God and live (1 Chron. 13:10). Since Mary was to be the vessel in whom Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, would be conceived and nurtured, she would have had to be a pure vessel,

without any taint of sin. She would have to have been conceived in her mother Anne's womb without sin. Catholics call this the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX solemnly defined it as an article of faith "that, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the Savior of the human race, the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception was, by a unique grace and privilege of almighty God, preserved from all stain of original sin."

Further, if it were within your power, would you ever allow your mother to be under the influence of the Evil One? God honored Mary by choosing her, above every other human being who would ever live, to be the Mother of Jesus. If God honored Mary in such a way, should not we honor her also? By honoring Mary and the saints we are simply emulating God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "*All generations will call me blessed*": 'The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.' 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.'