

The Intercession of St Mary - OUR MEDIATRIX **Father Tadros Y Malaty**

The Concept of Intercession

In our Orthodox Church, we cannot accept any mediator between God and people, except Jesus Christ, the sole High Priest of the heavens, and the Sacrifice by whose blood we receive the reconciliation and remission of sins. There is no other name under heaven by whom we can be saved except that of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12).

Perhaps one may ask: if that is the case why is it in the Church rites that believers ask for the intercession of St. Mary and the prayers of the Saints? Are there any evangelical texts that prove the Saints' intercession? Truly, the Gospel in its spirit and texts, aims at bringing man to the experience of divine life, that is, divine love. This means that the person puts aside his own-self, so that by the Holy Spirit he offers his whole life for the salvation of his fellow brethren. In other words the evangelical life is but an intermediary life, during which the believer does his best, through his deeds and prayers, to see that everybody is glorified in the bosom of God.

This is precisely the concept of "intercession". As the soul moves closer to God, in a deeper union with Jesus Christ it becomes more attached to others, and hence prays for them, asks for their salvation. That is what St. Macarius meant when he said that no man can obtain salvation outside his relationship with others. "We all pray for one another. Parents exhort their children, are solicitous for their salvation and pray for them. We are as St. Paul once said, 'God's co-adjutors'. Each of us is an intermediary, a mediator of grace for others". Looking to our Lord Jesus Christ we can establish the positive response that He has given to the intercession of people and their petitions for others. For instance, He healed the paralytic for the sake of those who brought him. (Mat. 9:2). He also healed the centurion's servant because of the petition of his master (Mat. 8:5) and the daughter of the Canaanite woman's madness in response to the cries of her mother. God, the lover of man, gives generously, longs to see us like Him, love the others and ask for them more than for ourselves.

On the other side, which follows directly from the above, it is evident that the evangelical love is always associated with a true humbleness. This implies that in our mind, we feel we are not worthy to pray for others, but rather we ask them to pray for us.

For instance St. Paul, knowing that he was called by God Himself for the ministry of the word through visions and revelations, still asked for the prayers of his people, so that the Lord may grant him the ability to preach. We then wonder, was the apostle inferior, not to ask God directly to give him what he wanted? Certainly not, but he felt the need to share love and humility with other people. Once again we may wonder, if human intercession between the Communion of the Saints does actually exist on earth, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then surely it is even more valid for those who enter Paradise, that they do not cease in praying for their brethren!! If, while on earth, tied down under the burden of flesh, they ask more for the others than for themselves, then how intense would their prayers be for those who are still living, when they are close to the author of Love Himself!

In brief, the intercession of Saints in our Orthodox concept confirms the effectiveness of the saving deeds of God in the life of every believer, and substantially rejects any ideas of worshipping Saints. It declares the unity of the Church, as members of one body, all members suffering if one is hurt, and pleased at the honour of others. (1 Cor. 12:26, 27).

The Mystery of Her Intercession:

From the above, we see that if we give importance to the principle of intercession in general, then how much more effective would be the prayers of the Mother of God for the salvation of Her children and brethren!! We have seen Her receive the motherhood of the Incarnate Son of God and become Mother of His flesh, i.e. His Church. This motherhood is not merely an honourable title but a responsibility for unceasing work. That is what Simeon The Elder has prophesized about the Virgin saying "and a sword will pierce your own soul too". (Luke 2:35).

The motherhood of Virgin Mary, which was started initially upon the free grace of God, who chose Her among all mankind, was verified by Her faith in the word and promises of God.... That has made Her a superior member of the body of Christ who responds to the need of the other members, seeking the salvation of everybody.

Limits of Her Intercession:

In the story of the wedding of Cana of Galilee, we can realize the limits of the intercession of the Mother and Virgin Mary. For she asked her Son: "they have no wine!!". Of course the Lord was aware of that, and surely he does not need to be reminded of the needs of his children or be told about it.... But our Lord Jesus, who is full of love, is pleased to see the mutual feelings of love in his mother and his children. Her request was only made once, but he answered "woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet". The Lord's reply signifies the intercession of the Virgin Mary:

First: It shows clearly the trust of his mother in Him, for she did not repeat her request, but with every assurance and confidence she said to the people “Do whatever He tells you”. She was positive that her Son would answer her request for His children.

Second: Through her conversation with the people of the wedding we can visualize her role in intercession. Certainly it is not giving worship to her personality, but to her ability to direct our hearts, to secretly carry out the commandment of her Son to “Do whatever He tells you”. Let us ask for Her prayers and intercessions that we may be able to fulfil the commandment of Her Son. Thus through Her motherhood to the Lord, we can be saved by the grace of the Blood of Her Begotten Son.