

The Intercession of the Saints (20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Hebrews 12:1-4—The Great Cloud of Witnesses

¹ Therefore, *since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,* ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, *who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, *so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.* ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Hebrews 12:1-4)

1. Cloud of Witnesses: great cloud of “witnesses” (Greek *martyrōn*) (12:1)

¹² What he [Judas Maccabee] saw was this: *Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man... was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews.* ¹³ *Then likewise a man appeared, distinguished by his gray hair and dignity, and of marvelous majesty and authority.* ¹⁴ And Onias spoke, saying, *“This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah, the prophet of God.”* (2 Macc 15:12-14)

2. Salvation History: litany of figures from Jewish Scripture and sacred history (11:1-40)

- a. Abraham and Sarah (11:1-19)
 - b. Isaac (11:20)
 - c. Jacob (11:21)
 - d. Joseph (11:22)
 - f. Moses and the Israelites (11:23-29)
 - g. Joshua and Israelites: who conquered the promised land (11:30)
 - h. Rahab: the prostitute (11:31)
 - i. Judges: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah (11:32)
 - j. Kings: David and Samuel (11:32)
 - k. Prophets: Daniel, Jeremiah, Elijah, Isaiah (11:32-34, 36-38)
 - l. Maccabees: “some were tortured, refusing to accept release” (11:35)
3. Perseverance: run with “perseverance” (Greek *hypomonē*); Jesus is model (12:1-2)
4. Martyrdom: “you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (12:4)

Living Tradition

Catechism: *The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom* [cf. Heb 12:1], especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, *and their prayer*

today. They contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth... Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world. (CCC 2683)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. What is the scriptural foundation for the intercession of the saints? What role does the intercession of the saints play in your own life of prayer?

For Further Reading

1. Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey. *Hebrews*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005.
2. St. Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*. Translated by F. R. Larcher, O.P. Lander, Wyo.: Aquinas Institute, 2012.
3. Mary Healy, *Hebrews*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker Academic, 2016.