

THE VENERATION OF SAINTS

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Something extraordinary happened to me many years ago that made me a believer in the power of a saint. I was at my desk in my office in Rome examining the academic records of a student, when people poured in to speak with me. After they had left, the document was gone. I called each of my visitors in case they took it by mistake. No one did. I searched all over the place, like the woman in the parable who swept her entire house in search of her lost silver coin, but to no avail. One of my colleagues said something I thought was mere pious belief, and a funny one at that: “Pray to Saint Anthony”. I smiled politely and muttered cynically: “Well...” However, in desperation I closed my eyes and prayed anyway to the saint. There was nothing to lose trying. I said: “Please let me find that blessed record, or the registrar would kill me, and worse I might be tempted to invent grades”. When I opened my eyes—believe it or not—the document was right under my nose!

I have since enjoyed the assistance of the patron saint for lost objects that, as one advance in years, can become a frequent occurrence. But my saint, I discovered, specializes only in lost objects, not in lost persons. I searched for a lost friend that I never saw again.

Popular Devotion and Liturgy

My preamble to this paper does not set the liturgical tone to our national meeting on the veneration of saints. My story belongs to popular, personal devotion, not to the category of liturgy. Nonetheless the veneration of saints, which is first and foremost a popular devotion, traditionally incorporated the celebration of Mass. Fr. Philippe Rouillard, a former colleague of mine and an expert in the cult of saints, informs us that in all probability the Mass was celebrated on the tomb of St. Polycarp as early as the year 155, and that by the third century it was customary to honor the martyrs with Mass (“The Cult of Saints in the East and the West”, *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, Vol. V, Liturgical Press, 2000, pp. 299-301).

The veneration of saints in the liturgy was originally limited to martyrs and bishops of great renown. As parenthetical note, this paper does not address the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a topic requiring a separate treatise. Other saintly persons were held in honor in the local Church where they had lived. Fr. Rouillard writes: “In the East as well as in the West, the liturgy of the saints has a twofold source: the cult of martyrs, whose anniversary was celebrated by the community gathered around their tombs, and the cult of bishops, whose memory was kept with devotion by the Churches they used to head” (p. 299). We are speaking here of local calendars of saints. Eventually some martyrs and

bishops gained universal fame and were inscribed in the calendar of many local Churches. Fr. Rouillard, who might annoy some devotees, adds that “for reasons not always clear, a small number of saints—for instance, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Rita of Cascia—became the objects of extraordinary popular devotion throughout the world, although their place in the Church’s liturgy is modest or even nonexistent”. Evidently it was not Fr. Rouillard that recommended St. Anthony to me.

At a time when some people nurse the idea that the Church’s unity consists in rigid uniformity; that the Roman Curia is above the local ecclesiastical government; and that the particular ritual of the local Church is nothing more than a faithful, literal translation of the typical edition of liturgical books, it is useful to remember that in the liturgy, local tradition holds a special position of respect. When the Roman Missal was issued in 1570, it did not impinge on the liturgical customs and usages of dioceses that had been in existence for 200 years (Pope Pius V: Bull *Quo primum tempore*, 1570). This wise Roman system of fostering unity and collegiality among local Churches is reflected by the Congregation for Divine Worship in the Instruction *Calendaria particularia* no. 23b (June 1970): “Feasts listed in the General Calendar for the same date are to be kept also in particular calendars, and the proper feasts coinciding on the same date transferred to the nearest free date. There is an exception when the date of the proper feast is so connected with local custom or popular devotion that it cannot be transferred without serious inconvenience.”

This instruction is particularly important for dioceses and parishes that celebrate their patron saints on Sunday concurrently with the town fiesta. To avail themselves of the lenience of the above-cited Roman document, they may elevate the local feast to the rank of solemnity so that they take precedence over Sunday in Ordinary Time. But there is an exception to the exception: they cannot take precedence over certain festivities in the universal calendar, namely Easter Triduum, Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, Ash Wednesday, weekdays of holy week, Easter Octave, and Solemnities of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and other saints in the universal calendar, and All Souls Day. In these instances local custom and popular devotion will have to give way to the strict regulations of the universal calendar. Probably the reasonable thing to do is to move the local feast or solemnity away from the above festivities and pastorally work among the faithful to resign themselves with pliant and joyful hearts to the transfer of their patron saint’s feast to a less problematic date.

The instruction acknowledges the importance of local saints also as regards their rank. It directs that a local optional memorial should take precedence over a universal one. There may be cases when the universal obligatory memorial could be downgraded to the rank of optional, so that there would be two optional memorials on the same day, thus offering a free choice. On February 3, for example, there are two optional memorials: St. Blase and St. Anscar. I would obviously choose St. Anscar, the historical ninth-century Benedictine Apostle of Northern Europe, over an obscure fourth-century Armenian

bishop who is invoked against sore throats. If the competitor of the local optional memorial is a universal obligatory memorial, the latter may even be transferred to a later date. Clearly local saints have an edge over saints in the universal calendar provided they enjoy the same rank.

Local calendars are based on the universal calendar, but there is no reason why local saints should not enjoy a higher rank in the national Ordo. I am of the opinion that the memorial of the first and so far only Filipino canonized saint, Lorenzo Ruiz, should be raised to the rank of feast. Though he was not a bishop, priest, or religious but a simple married man, his struggle to keep the faith in the face of execution is a commanding example for ordinary Christians and a witness to God's unfailing grace.

The above musings on re-ranking the feasts of saints require of course the approval of the Bishops' Conference and the subsequent *confirmatio* of the Congregation for Divine Worship. This could be worked out with the assistance of the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy.

Theological Foundation

Art. 104 of the Constitution on Liturgy offers the theological basis why we venerate the saints. It reads: "By celebrating their passage from earth to heaven the Church proclaims the paschal mystery achieved in the saints, who have suffered and been glorified with Christ; it proposes them to the faithful as examples drawing all to the Father through Christ and pleads through their merits for God's favors."

Upmost in the theology of the Liturgy Constitution is the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, burial, and resurrection. The entire liturgical year centers on the paschal mystery, which it celebrates solemnly once a year at the Easter Triduum and every week on the Lord's Day. The paschal mystery comes alive not only at Christmas, Ascension, and Pentecost, but also at every feast of the Lord including Sundays in Ordinary Time. All these mysteries prepared or expanded the core mystery of his death and resurrection. The Liturgy Constitution, however, does not stop there. It affirms that the paschal mystery is recalled also when we celebrate the feasts of saints. The Liturgy Constitution fastens them together. Indeed the sanctoral cycle is a Christological cycle: "By celebrating their passage from earth to heaven the Church proclaims the paschal mystery achieved in the saints, who have suffered and been glorified with Christ".

The blood shed by the martyrs is mingled with the blood of Christ. The bitter tears of the saints are joined to his "tears and loud cries of supplication" as he hung on the cross. The daily struggles of the ordinary Christians as they journey through the hardships of life are associated with his struggle of faith and obedience to God's will as he agonized in the garden. It is this life-long struggle to remain loyal to Christ that defines Christians as

martyrs even if they do not physically shed blood. As the former Prefect for the Congregation for the Saints pointedly remarked, “Martyrdom by blood sometimes takes but a few hours, but the daily witnessing to Christ is a life-long martyrdom”.

From the start of my formation at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute the paschal mystery had taken the lion’s share of my theological ruminations. The paschal mystery was the byword of my professors, those giants of liturgy that roamed the earth before, during, and after the Council. The paschal mystery was also the password to open any file of liturgical study. I remember with gratitude two of my mentors, Abbot Salvatore Marsili and Fr. Burkhard Neunheuser, who plunged me into the theological depths of the paschal mystery.

The sublime conciliar teaching on the paschal mystery and the saints is only faintly echoed by the everyday, down-to-earth reality of popular devotion. The opening prayers for saints may carry something about the relationship between the paschal mystery and the saints, but not the novena prayers unless liturgical theologians composed them. However the Liturgy Constitution does not ignore popular devotion. It states that the Church proposes the saints to the faithful “as examples drawing all to the Father through Christ and pleads through their merits for God’s favors”. In a word, saints are our models and intercessors. The role-modelling of saints is not new. The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, written around the year 157, informs us that the faithful gathered at the tomb of the saint on the anniversary of his death to honor him and to train those that come after him to be ready for martyrdom (“Martyrdom of Polycarp”, *Early Christian Fathers*, Philadelphia 1953, p. 18).

I return to Fr. Rouillard who writes: “The question of the role of saints as examples to be imitated is more delicate. Many saints are rare and precious samples, but practically inimitable” (p. 311). He asks: “How are Christians to imitate persons as exceptional as St. Thomas Aquinas or St. John Vianney?” At any rate, what is foremost in popular piety is not the role-modelling of the saints but their sought-after role as intercessors. Few of those that invoke St. Jude Thaddeus have the aspiration to imitate an Apostle we know little about. I should not exclude the influence of some saints on the spirituality of the faithful. The “little way” of St. Therese of Lisieux, for example, has fascinated and inspired men and women alike who obviously do not have the ambition to enter the convent and spend their lives like little flowers.

This brings us to the topic of naming the newly baptized after the saints. In former times the usual practice was to check the saint of the day in the calendar who then became the model and intercessor of the child. Going by the calendar of saints could spell discomfiture for the female child who might receive the feminized form of a male name like Tomasa, or the name of some feasts like Epifania on January 6, Candelaria on February 2, Natividad on December 25, or Circuncision on January 1. In instances when the name chosen for the child did not represent anything Christian the pastor generally

Christianized the name by prefixing Maria or Jose. For example, the geographical name Luzviminda became Maria Luzviminda, and the patriotic name Rizal became Jose Rizal. Today things become somewhat more problematic when children are given such baptismal names as Coke and Pepsi.

Bearing the name of a saint should become a program of Christian life. This finds resonance in the way the Jewish people put stock on the meaning of names that, besides identifying the person, also often marked him or her for a divinely-inspired mission: Abraham, Israel, Moses, Jesus, John [the Baptist], Peter, and Paul. It does not always work of course. The meaning of my patron saint's name Anscar or Oscar is "spear of God". There is no compelling reason for me to behave like one. But his missionary dedication among the heathens of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden is inspiring. I am still humored and I should admit, honored, when the Bishop of Sweden had proposed that I carry on the apostolate of my patron. However, if I cannot imitate his missionary endeavor, his motto is a program of a lifetime: *Intus monachus, foris apostolus*. At a time when young people are in search of models to imitate and perhaps patrons to invoke should not their Christian names mean anything to them?

As a rule the Roman liturgy addresses its prayers, especially the presidential, to the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. On feasts of saints the liturgy uses the formula *intercedente* or by the intercession of the saint being commemorated. This Latin ablative absolute is not to be confused with the formula "through Christ Our Lord". The former is incidental to the prayer, the latter is essential. We rally the saints to plead for us through the merits of Christ, but it is Christ who alone is the mediator of our prayer. It is our firm belief that no one can go to the Father except through Christ. In theology mediation is a technical word that can be applied only to Christ if we take the lead of 1 Tim 2:5: "For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all". Christ alone is God and man; he alone could offer his life with both divine efficacy and supreme human pain. No saint, not even the Mother of God, is both divine and human by nature; no human blood, but Christ's, can cleanse us definitively from sin and reconcile us with God. The Constitution on the Church (art. 62) makes an enlightening statement on the matter. It says: "The Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. These however are to be so understood that they neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator".

What then does the intercession of saints mean? I confess I am groping for ideas. First of all it is not a kind of alternative door to enter into the heart of God or a window that opens when the door is shut. There are no alternatives to Christ and he never closes the door. No saint loves us more than Christ loves us; no saint cares for us more than Christ cares for us. But as the angels are God's messengers to us, so the saints are our messengers to Christ. God does not need angels to commune with us; neither do we need

saints to speak with Christ. But in the mystifying sphere of what we call the communion of saints, I believe that there exists an alliance between heaven and earth, between those that have preceded us to the realm of light and those that still sit in the shadow of death. The saints in heaven continue to worship before God's throne. They live in the embrace of Christ. Close to him, they can whisper to his ear, laying before him the petitions of their sisters and brothers on earth.

There are saints we invoke as patrons. In their lifetime or by some unexplained attribution after their death certain influence or power has been predicated to them. They specialize, so to speak, in particular human circumstances or needs. Books of Saints carry an amazing list of patron saints for every conceivable situation. The Philippine Ordo is not an exception. It indicates the saint's area of responsibility or specialization. It mentions, for example, that innumerable cures, including cancer, have been attributed to the Augustinian Recollect St. Ezechiel Moreno who worked as missionary in the Philippines.

Liturgical Norms

1. The Calendar of Saints

The Roman liturgical calendar has two main features: the temporal and the sanctoral cycles. Temporal refers to the celebration of Christ's mysteries in the liturgical seasons, Sundays, feasts, and weekdays. Sanctoral refers to the saints. In the 12th century there were only 90 feasts listed in the sanctoral cycle. By the time the Council of Trent was convoked in 1545 the number had jumped to 220, thus significantly reducing the temporal to a mere 145 days. Historian of the liturgy, Fr. Neunheuser, notes that among the chief liturgical reforms of the Council of Trent was the reduction of the sanctoral in order to restore the primacy of the temporal (*Storia della liturgia*, Rome 1999, p. 137). In 1568 the Dominican St. Pius V brought the number down to 130. But popular piety toward the saints persistently ignored the calendar reform of Trent. On the eve of Vatican II the number of the feasts of saints, not including those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, had mounted to a staggering 270. Vatican II had to intervene. According to Fr. Rouillard (p. 308) the calendar reform of 1969 eliminated about 100 feasts of saints in order to give way to the temporal cycle.

It is helpful to be acquainted with the criteria used by the 1969 *Calendarium Romanum generale*. Msgr. Pierre Journel's work *Le renouveau du culte de saints dans la liturgie romaine*, published in Rome in 1986, is enlightening. The core criterion was historical certainty. In consequence the popular patron of lovers, St. Valentine, was unceremoniously dismissed. It was rumored that this happened because a Franciscan archaeologist by the name of Fr. Amore (an ironic coincidence!) discovered that the tombstone of the saint was fake.

The second criterion was the universal renown of the saint. It was a decisive factor for the suppression of 70 feasts of saints, including Roman martyrs and popes who were practically unknown. The third criterion was to institute feasts of saints that would represent every continent and century, thus paving the way to non-European as well as modern saints. The fourth criterion was ecumenical, for which I am grateful. My patron saint was included in the new list because the Lutherans of Norway and Sweden hold him in high esteem.

What are the guiding principles for the veneration of saints in the liturgy? The Liturgy Constitution (art. 111) enunciates them: “Lest the feasts of the saints take precedence over the feasts commemorating the very mysteries of salvation, many of them should be left to be celebrated by a particular Church or nation or religious family. Those only should be extended to the universal Church that commemorate saints of a truly universal significance”.

The conciliar document calls attention to the following principles. The first is the primacy of the temporal cycle that commemorates the mysteries of Christ over the sanctoral. This principle, which has its origin in the early development of the liturgical calendar, was drastically applied in the Tridentine post-conciliar reform that reduced the sanctoral cycle from 220 to 130 feasts. Clearly, good liturgical sense dictates that we give to Christ what belongs to Christ and to the saints what belongs to the saints.

The second principle, which is somewhat like an implementing rule, is the distinction between the universal and the local calendars. The universal calendar is contained in the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* that was issued 1969 by the Sacred Congregation of Rites and appended to the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*. The universal calendar is the typical edition upon which the local calendars are based. Though local calendars are rooted in the universal, they have a life of their own because they mirror the liturgical life of a nation, diocese, parish, or religious family. Each of these local calendars will contain particular features that are proper or even peculiar to the place, like the dedication of the cathedral, dedication of a parish church, feasts of patron saints, and special liturgical activities like Rogation Day and cause-oriented days like Sunday *pro negritis*. The repository of the local calendar are the different *Ordos* that belong to the Bishops' Conference, diocese, parish, and religious communities.

Few dioceses and probably no parishes have their proper *Ordos*. Religious congregations normally do. Should the bishop or parish priest muster enough courage to prepare yearly their proper *Ordos*, they should base them on the National *Ordo* compiled by Fr. Genaro O. Diwa, which in turn is based on the universal calendar.

The third principle has something to do with the universal significance of the saint. The application of this principle has, in some cases, been subject to debate. Some liturgists question the inclusion in the universal calendar of a universally unknown 19th century Lebanese saint, Sharbel Makhluf. The same principle is valid for the national calendar. I realize that I tread on contestable ground when I argue with some religious communities that their founders or foundresses still need to acquire national recognition and impact in order to be admitted to the National Ordo. They might argue back, rightly, that some saints listed in the Ordo are less known and some of them are in fact obscure. In reply, I can only paraphrase George Orwell's famous observation in *Animal Farm*: In the liturgical calendar some saints are more equal than others. The best recommendation I can offer to religious communities is to observe their particular Ordo and celebrate their saints with great solemnity in parishes entrusted to them and in their schools and other institutions.

The Instruction *Calendaria particularia* (no. 27) has made a reform of the titles of saints. It suppressed such titles as confessor and bishop, confessor non-bishop, neither virgin nor martyr, and widow. I appreciate the problem the word "confessor" could cause among those who relate it with the sacrament of penance. I welcome the abolition of the politically incorrect designation "neither virgin nor martyr", which is a disagreeable way of describing holy women like St. Mary Magdalene and St. Monica. However I am not happy with the suppression of the title "widow". In ancient times the Church instituted the Order of Widows whose task was to pray and serve the poor of the community. The Church continues to have widows among its members, those pious and generous "women of Jerusalem" that spend their lives in prayer and service of the parish.

But I cannot hide my perplexity over the superiority predicated to the religious status. A mother who entered the convent after she had dutifully reared her children is given the title "religious". It seems to me that Christian motherhood ranks higher than religious life. Mary is first and foremost Mother; her virginity is an accessory to her role of Mother of God. There are two fine examples of this. One is St. Bridget of Sweden, mother of eight, who founded the Order of the Most Holy Savior. She is listed as religious. The other is St. Elizabeth of Hungary who bore three children. After she was widowed, she became a Franciscan tertiary. She now carries the title "religious".

At any rate the Instruction foresees that in some particular or local calendars new titles may have to be appended to saints in order to make them true-to-life models or exemplars. St. Isidro Labrador, patron of farmers, is married man; St. Monica is married woman; and St. Rock (Roque) is healer. Other saints may carry the titles of educator, missionary, soldier, king, queen, and perhaps in some distant future president of a nation. The titles are not merely honorific; they signify that holiness of life is possible in every state of life and in every honest profession.

The Instruction (n. 34) makes a timely reminder regarding the patronal title of a church: “Just as there is to be only one principal patron [of a cathedral or parish church], from now there is only one title for a church, except in the case of saints listed together in the calendar [Sts. Peter and Paul; Sts. Cosmas and Damian]”.

2. The Images of Saints

The veneration of saints generally incorporates the veneration of their images at home, churches, and other places of worship. When placed in churches where the community gathers for public worship, the images of saints become part of the Church’s profession and celebration of faith. Not only words and gestures but also images express what the Church believes, teaches, and celebrates in the liturgy. This explains why the images placed in church are subject to norms issued by the Church.

In the Catholic Philippines the topic of sacred images in the liturgy should not be isolated from the doctrinal concerns raised by other Christian groups. There is no doubt that gross exaggeration regarding sacred images exists among some of the Catholic faithful. But the fundamentalist response, which often involves outright destruction of sacred images, is irreverent and offensive to Catholic sentiment. From the fifth to the eight century the Church fought bitterly against iconoclasm or the breaking of sacred images. Bishops were deposed and exiled, monks (who were the chief propagators of icons) were harassed and mutilated, and many suffered violent death in defense of their belief. They did not undergo persecution for Trinitarian or Christological tenets: we are talking about images! I stand in awe and admiration of such courageous manifestation of faith and promise myself to give due reverence to sacred images and their veneration by the faithful.

Nonetheless, there is need on the part of both the Catholic faithful and their fundamentalist sisters and brothers to exercise moderation, which is the mother of all virtues. The words addressed by Pope Gregory the Great to Bishop Serenus of Marseille regarding this subject are relevant: “We commend you for forbidding the adoration of sacred images, but we reprimand you for destroying them”.

What is the official stand of the Church? According to the Liturgy Constitution (art. 125), “The practice of placing sacred images in churches so that they may be venerated by the faithful is to be maintained. Nevertheless, there is to be restraint regarding their number and prominence so that they do not create confusion among the Christian people or foster religious practices of doubtful orthodoxy”. Vatican II reaffirms the centuries-old teaching of the Church on the veneration of sacred images.

In the year 787 the Council of Nicaea II declared the legitimacy of venerating sacred images. These are to be placed on vessels, clothes, walls, at home, and in streets to remind the faithful to follow the example of the person represented by the image. In the

words of the Council, “The more we look at these images, the more we are reminded of the persons they represent and are inspired to exert effort to imitate them.”

As regards the acts of veneration the Council teaches: “The honor given to an image is given to the one it represents. Whoever venerates an image venerates the person it represents”. Thus when we pray and perform gestures of respect before a sacred image, we do not address them directly to the image, as if it could see and hear us, but to the person it represents. The image stands for the person of the saint, but it is not the person of the saint. The honor we give to the image is not received by the image but by the person it represents. The Council makes a useful distinction between veneration (*proskynesis*) and adoration (*latreia*). I suggest that we explain this carefully to devotees. Adoration is a total and absolute submission of one’s entire being. This is given to God alone. That is why we do not adore images; we honor them. Likewise I recommend that we explain what we mean when we burn incense, light candles, kiss, kneel, genuflect or dance before images of saints. These are culture-based signs of respect, not a theological statement about the nature of the image. It is useful to remember that signs and symbols are polyvalent. In the liturgy the same symbol, like candles and incense, can bear a variety of meaning depending on the circumstance. The slap the bishop used to give to the newly confirmed was originally a kiss, while the kiss of Judas was a slap on Christ’s love.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed the doctrine of Nicaea II, namely: the practice of venerating sacred images in churches should be continued; veneration is not to be confused with adoration, which is given to God alone; and the honor shown to images expresses our adoration of Christ and our respect for the saints who are represented by the image.

The Council adds a point of clarification: we are not to believe that in the images “the divinity or a power is present, for which they are venerated, or that there is anything we can ask from them, or that we can put our trust in them as did the pagans who put their hope in idols”. I sympathize with devotees that will find difficulty in digesting this doctrine. It is a rather widespread belief that there is a mysterious presence of divine power in some sacred images, for which reason they are believed to be miraculous. The Oriental theologian St. John Damascene (+749) was of this persuasion. Sacred images, according to him, are “channels” of divine grace, in the manner of the sacraments. In consideration of the persons they represent, a sanctifying or miraculous power is attached to them. Sacred images possess a quasi-sacramental power. Neither the Council of Nicaea II nor the Council of Trent appropriated this doctrine. However, it is a belief that characterizes the Byzantine and the entire Oriental veneration of sacred image and, I reckon, a great number of our Filipino devotees.

The Liturgy Constitution (art. 125) wants us to exercise “restraint regarding the number and prominence” of sacred images in church. The *General Instruction on the*

Roman Missal (no. 318) elaborates this conciliar decree. The text is a mouthful, but I believe it is worth quoting in full, even if I take the liberty to classify each sentence under a heading:

1. Sacred Images for Veneration and as Guides to the Mysteries of Faith: “In keeping with the Church’s very ancient tradition, images of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints may be displayed in sacred buildings for the veneration by the faithful, and may be so arranged there that they guide the faithful to the mysteries of faith celebrated there”.
2. Restraint in the Number of Images: “For this reason, care should be taken that the number of these images not be increased indiscriminately, and that the images are arranged in a proper order so as not to distract the faithful’s attention from the celebration itself”.
3. One Image per Saint: “As a rule, there is to be only one image of any given saint”.
4. Respect for the People’s Devotion “In general, when dealing with the ornamentation and arrangement of a church, the criteria regarding images should be the devotion of the entire community as well as the beauty and dignity of the images”.

A couple of the above statements should be given appropriate emphasis. Since sacred images have a subordinate role in the liturgy, that is, they lead the attention of the assembly to the liturgical mystery, it is commonsense that they are not prominently displayed. In the sanctuary the principal furnishings that should be given prominence are the altar, the crucifix, the ambo, and the chair of the presider. Sacred images should not compete with these furnishings by their location of eminence or their gigantic proportions that dwarf the altar. In relation to this, the *Rite of Dedication of a Church and Altar* (no. 10) makes the provision that “in new churches statues of saints may not be placed above the altar”. In other words, in churches built after 1977, the image on the apse of the sanctuary should be the crucifix, not the image of the patron saint.

The liturgy has always put stock on the noble character and artistic beauty of the places and worship and their furnishings. In this connection the Liturgy Constitution makes a timely reminder to bishops: “Let bishops carefully remove from the house of God and from other places of worship those works of artists that are repugnant to faith and morals and to Christian devotion and offend true religious sense either by their grotesqueness or by the deficiency, mediocrity, or sham in their artistic quality.”

“Care should be taken that the number of these images not be increased indiscriminately”. We are dealing with numbers, and pastors know that numbers can be a tricky business. It is not easy to define the correct limit to the number of images in the church. For some, the sky is the limit and the more the merrier. But the other extreme could be equally reprehensible. The *Consilium ad exsequendam* deplors both extremes: “In the adaptation of churches to the demands of liturgical renewal there has sometimes

been exaggeration regarding sacred images. At times, it is true, some churches have been cluttered with images and statues, but to strip bare and do away with absolutely everything is to risk the opposite extreme” (*Le renouveau liturgique*, 1965, no. 8).

Many of our colonial churches have “retablo” containing several images of saints. “Retablos” and the statues of saints in their niches are often a valuable work of art. The Congregation for the Clergy exhorts: “Works of art from the past are always and everywhere to be preserved so that they may lend their noble participation in the liturgy”. The same Congregation grieves over the fact “that more than ever before there is so much unlawful transferral of ownership of the historical and artistic heritage of the church, as well as theft, confiscation and destruction” (*Circular Letter “Opera artis”* 1971). It is distressing to see sacred images that were once the object of veneration and prayer now displayed in antique shops or worse as decorative furniture in houses and offices.

“As a rule, there is to be only one image of any given saint”. To my knowledge it is not prevalent practice to have more than one statue of the same saint in church, and whenever I chance on duplication I gently inform the pastor about the norm. My hunch is that the above rule refers primarily to the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary who is honored under myriad of titles, each with its corresponding image. It is not customary for other saints to be venerated under different titles. The discipline of one image of any given saint is intended to dispel superstitious and erroneous beliefs regarding images of the same person, especially of the Blessed Virgin. Some devotees claim that the image of our Lady of Fatima is more powerful than that of our Lady of Lourdes! But since some Filipino devotees prefer to play on the safe side, they satisfy both images by praying before one and the other.

Conclusion

To discourse about saints is to acknowledge God’s marvellous work of salvation through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The vastness of the universe, the beauty of Mother Earth, the array of stars that proclaim the glory of their Creator: all of these hush us to silent admiration of God’s creation. The beauty of nature fascinates us, but it can also terrify us when it unleashes its fury. And yet who are we to doubt that God is present in the storms of life that toss us in the sea of uncertainty?

We are awed by scientific advances: aircrafts carrying millions of people across oceans and continents; men landing on the moon and spacecrafts orbiting other planets; mobile phones connecting people around the globe in seconds. These are the endowments of divine knowledge that impel us to believe that God can form us in his own image and likeness; that God can turn hearts of stones into living flesh; that God can make sinners saints.

Perhaps there is no better way to conclude these musings on the saints than to recite the first preface for holy men and women. It superbly sums up the Church's doctrine on the veneration of saints.

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.
You are glorified in your saints, for their glory is the crowning of your gifts.
In their lives on earth you give us an example.
In our communion with them, you give us their friendship.
In their prayer for the Church you give us strength and protection.
This great company of witnesses spurs us on to victory,
to share the prize of everlasting glory through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

That in all things God may be glorified.