

The Invocation of Saints and Feasts

Our church believes in the ancient customs of honoring the heroic servants of God but it does not offer them the adoration which befits God. It has on its list of known saints hundreds of names – men and women. The saints are chosen friends of God; they are souls which have served Him well. They are deserving of our homage, because of their holiness. They are united to us, we honor them and they pray for us. They present our prayers to the Almighty and unite them to their own; we honor them with religious homage in order that thereby we may obtain the assistance of those beloved friends of God. When we offer homage to them, when we build churches and institute feasts in their honor, we are not depriving God of adoration, we are adoring Him the more because we are honoring the results of the work of His grace.

We have a prodigious number of saints and martyrs in the Church and every day has a saint. Among the Saints the most celebrated are St. George, Tekla Haymanote, Gabra Manfas Kidus, John the Baptist, the Apostle, Frumentius, Yared, Pantalewon, Basalota Mikael, Anorewos (Honorius), St. Aaron, Filipos, St. Stefanos, St. Ewostatewos (Eustathius), St. Marqorewos, SS. Fere Mikael and Zara Abraham, St. Aba Kemzun, St. Takla Hawaryat, St. Waltala Petros, the ‘Nine Saints’, St. Qirqos, St. Aragawi, King Caleb, St. Lalibela, St. Tewodros, St. Amba Mikael, St. Mabaa Seyon, St. Helena, St. Martha, St. Esther, St. Judith, St. Elisabeth, St. Anna, St. Magdalawit, St. Maryam (of Course). Each family has its own patron saint or angel whose feast it celebrates every year both in church and at home when friends and neighbors are invited.

Various feasts of the Blessed Virgin and the angels and Saints and Martyrs are celebrated. They are usually dated in accordance with the secular calendar and are commemorated on a definite date each year. According to the Ethiopian calendar the feasts of some saints are

celebrated as follows: St. John on Jan. 4, St. Stephan Jan. 1, St. George April 23, the Days of Baptism Jan. 11, the 318 Nicaean Fathers September 21, Dioscorus Sep. 7, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob 28th of each month, Cyril of Alexandria Feb. 14.

Senkesar or seneksar is the calendar of Ethiopian Church. In this we have notices of the saints and Martyrs. A short, rhymed poem, known as a Salam, is added at the end of each notice. As example, on the 28th of Sene the list of notice (each followed by a Salam) is as follow:

1. Memorial of the Feast of Nativity of our Lord,
2. The Holy Martyrs, the seven ascetics of Tuna and their 140 companions,
3. The Holy Martyrs, Abba, Hor, Abba Besoy and Daydarn their mother,
4. Tewodros (Theodore), son of David, king of Ethiopia,
5. Mark, king of Rome,
6. The two fold translation of the body of St. Amda Mikael, once in the reign of Eskander and again in the reign of Lebna Dengel.

Another Example:

Sene 12 (June 6) Lalibela. 'On this day is also (the feast of) Lalibela king of Ethiopia, the blessed and pure, and the seer of the mystery of heaven. This Saint his parents reared from the day of his birth in the fear of God. Then follows, as usual, the short rhymed poem known as the Salam:

'Hail King Lalibela, who in dry stone

With wisdom churches built, nor mortar used

To show that his should be the kingly power,

(People and kings he charmed with honey sweet)

Bees round him swarmed the day that he was born'.

Among the churches built in honor of saints are St. George's Cathedral, St. Stephan and St. Mary churches in Addis Ababa.

What is Intercession?

The formal definition of intercession is a “supplication to God on behalf of another person. Christ intercedes before God the Father on behalf of the repentant sinner, and God’s people intercede for one another.”

We ask the intercessions of Saint Mary, the Angels, and Archangels. We ask the disciples, apostles, martyrs, fathers, and saints to pray on our behalf. Not only do we intercede to the saints in heaven, but also to one another here on earth.

A special type of intercession, redemptive intercession, was the act of Our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ is the only mediator between God, the Father, and man in salvation. There is no other savior or redeemer.

Where is Intercession in the Bible? Examples from the Old and New Testaments

Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made

a bronze serpent and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when looked at the bronze serpent, he lived (Numbers 21:7-9).

Continue earnestly in prayer being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak (Colossians 4:2-4).

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26).

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church...Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, a light shone in prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands. (Acts 12:5,7).

And again he entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He [Jesus] was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 2:1-5).

Why do we have intercession? Why is it important?

We may encounter this argument: "Why do I need intercession? I can just pray to God directly." Of course, there is no doubt that you could, but let us give an example. Have you ever

asked your priest, for instance, to pray for you so that God might help you at school, or because a family member is ill, for instance? Sure, we probably all have. So, if we ask someone on earth to pray on our behalf, how much more can we ask of the saints and angels, who are in communion with God in heaven.

“If we believe in the value of praying for one another, then we should believe in the value of intercessions. Not to believe in the intercessions of the saints is either to deny that these saints are alive or to deny that they are capable of praying. Both of these are obviously wrong assumptions as clear from the scripture above. Therefore, denying the value of intercessions is to reject the scriptures” (William Hanna Intercessions at <http://pharos.bu.edu/cn/lessons/intercessions.txt>).

The Orthodox Church firmly believes in the power of prayer and intercessions. It is an integral part of our worship and rule of prayer. It is through the prayers of these saints that we continue to ask for God’s guidance and help, and to grant us salvation.

May the Prayers of all the Saints be with us all.

GLORY BE TO GOD FOREVER. AMEN."