A patron saint is simply a spiritual supporter or advocate. A person may be named after a saint at baptism, take the name of a patron at confirmation, or simply have a devotion to a particular saint. Saints are patrons of places, nations, activities, conditions, occupations, and more. For instance, St. Peregrine is the patron of cancer sufferers and the Immaculate Conception is patron of the United States. Your church's name reflects your parish patron. A patron saint “provides a model of charity and the assurance of his prayer” (CCC, 2165), so Catholics are encouraged — but not required — to build a prayerful relationship with their patrons.

PRAYER TO A PATRON SAINT

Dear [saint's name], I ask you to pray to God for me, to give me strength in my faith, courage in my convictions, and hope in my future. I ask you now for your help in [list need]. I trust and believe that you will hear my prayer and intercede on my behalf. Amen.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The Communion of Saints, spoken of in the creed, is the spiritual union among those of us on earth with those in purgatory and those in heaven. This union is “reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 955). In other words, we here on earth can pray for those in purgatory, and those in heaven can hear our requests and, through God's grace, act on our behalf. Our prayers to the saints and their responses are called “intercessions.”

Many people wonder why Catholics pray to the saints when only God can answer prayer. The easiest way to understand is to think of the saints as friends in high places. Just as we might ask a friend here on earth to help us with a task or project, so, too, we can ask the saints for their assistance. It may be more accurate to say that we ask the saints to pray for us instead of saying we pray to them.

Remember that we Catholics venerate the saints, but we worship God. Worship means to submit completely, and therefore we can only worship God. Veneration, on the other hand, means paying honor. When we venerate the saints, we honor them, but we also recognize that they can do nothing for us without the approval and grace of God.

PATRON SAINTS

A patron is someone who gives support to an individual or an organization. In earlier times, a patron would provide a person, usually an artist, with the financial support needed to produce their art. The Medici family, for instance, were patrons of Leonardo da Vinci. Even today we are familiar with patrons of the arts.

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saints. The first kind are all those good people, like your grandmother, who lived a holy life and whom we hope (and pray) are now in heaven. These are the saints who “go marching in” in the famous Southern spiritual of the same name. The second kind of saints are those with a capital “S” in front of their names, like St. Peter, St. John Paul II, and St. Teresa of Calcutta. These individuals lived such exemplary lives that, after an exhaustive process called canonization, the Church formally and officially pronounces they are now in heaven. 

SAINTS IN SCRIPTURE

In Scripture, the use of the word “saints” is often used to address Christians who live in a particular area — for example, in Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians: “To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord” (1 Cor 1:2). “Saints” appears sixty-seven times in Scripture. Most of the saints mentioned in Scripture have become part of the official canon of saints of the Catholic Church even though they were never formally canonized.

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