

Sunday, July 14, 2013

Why do we pray for the departed?

Some people ask me:

Why do we pray for the departed? Will prayers ever change their situation in heaven? Why do we conduct liturgies in their memorial?

We can summarize the answer in the following points:

1- The reposed among the believers are part of the body of Christ. Death does not separate them from the body of Christ; they merely departed to a different place. Therefore, it is appropriate to maintain this connection among the members of the body of Christ through prayer. They pray for us and we pray for them.

2- Prayer is a sign of the love that never ceases to exist between the visible church on earth and the invisible church in heaven.

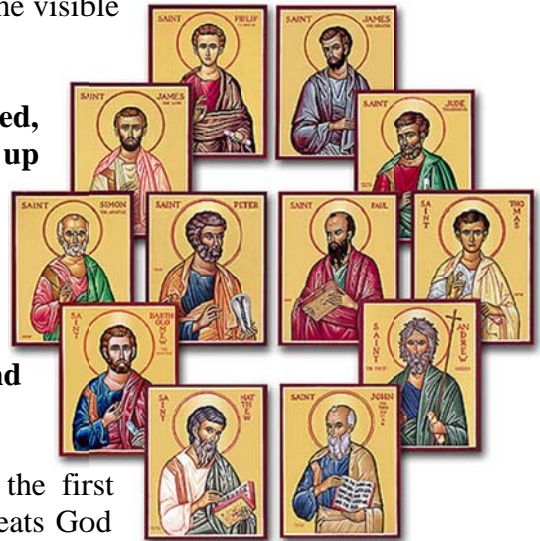
3- The church always asks God to repose the souls of the departed, and in doing so she declares her love towards them. She leaves it up to God who doesn't overlook the labor of love to decide their fate.

4- God's mercy is so vast. We do our part and ask for his mercy without having any particular expectations as to what He can do with the departed. We can only trust his mercy and great compassion.

5- The Prayer for the reposed is a well-established doctrine in the first century church. For instance, we see that St. Paul the Apostle entreats God for the sake of Onesiphorus who had departed to heaven after much labor in the ministry, "The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day." (2Timothy 1:18). Similarly, we ask for the divine mercy on behalf of our beloved ones who departed.

6- Sometimes, there are transgressions that are committed unknowingly or inadvertently that the departed person did not pay attention to them and didn't offer repentance for them. The church prays for these are the transgressions so that God may forgive them, as the prayer of the departed states: "Forgive the sins that were committed, knowingly or unknowingly, for You know the weakness and deficiency of mankind."

7- As to why we dedicate liturgies in memorial of the reposed? The answer is: In the Divine Liturgy, the visible church communes with the invisible one around the divine throne. The visible church is invited to the Heavens and in turn, she calls all the saints who pleased God since the beginning (in the commemoration of the saints) so that they share with her the celebration of the lamb slain for the life of the world. This is an opportunity for everyone to be nourished with the praise of the king of kings. It is an opportunity to partake of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Perhaps this is also an opportunity for the reposed to meet with their beloved ones who are still in the flesh so that everyone is consoled with the heavenly comfort.



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