

# Is there proper statue etiquette in churches?



**Question:** I have been in many Catholic churches around the world, and the statue of Mary was always on the left side of the altar, as you face it. But at my church in Florida, she is on the right side. Why?

– **Ben Hoffman**, via email

**Answer:** There is no Church law about the arrangement of statues or on which side the Blessed Mother's statue should be. This is more a matter of custom and may be affected by the design of the Church and the placement of other statues such as the parish's patron saint. You are correct in noting that it is common to see the Blessed Mother's likeness to the left when facing the sanctuary, but this is far from universal.

## Masses for the dead

**Question:** I read the story about how Pope St. Gregory the Great – pontiff from A.D. 590 to 604 – offered 30 consecutive Masses for the repose of the soul of Justus, a monk. After the 30th Mass, Justus appeared to one of his fellow monks and announced that he had been delivered from purgatory. If we, as believing Christians, have 30 masses offered for the repose of our loved one's soul, will their soul also be released from purgatory?

– **John Walden**, via email

**Answer:** It is a clear principle that our prayers always benefit those for whom we pray, including those in purgatory. However, the degree of benefit will vary based on the person's need, their ability to receive the blessings and, obviously, the will of God. We ought not suppose that our prayers alone

will somehow force God's hand or require things of him. Praying for the souls in purgatory is a spiritual work of mercy that is expected of us. The ancient custom of 30 consecutive "Gregorian" Masses is praiseworthy and surely of benefit to any soul for whom these are offered, but we cannot presume to know that it always and for every soul ends the purgatorial process. Hence, we pray, as we ought, and leave the rest to God.

## Heaven

**Question:** Is it wrong to think of heaven as an extension of our greatest earthly pleasures, hobbies and interests? I've attended many funerals where clergy have made comments such as, "Uncle Bob went to that great golf course in the sky." It certainly sounds comforting and even amusing, but do we retain our pleasures on earth in heaven?

– **Anonymous**, San Dimas, California

**Answer:** Such remarks at funerals, while understandable, limit our understanding of heaven. The Scriptures record something far greater than a golf course or any accumulation of worldly hobbies and pleasures: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). The heart of heaven is to be with God and to be caught up in the immense love, glory, joy and ecstasy of God together with all the saints. Even if one could play golf, it seems unlikely that he would want to. Far greater realities are present. While it is challenging to imagine the unimaginable, the point is not to diminish what heaven is just to make it understandable to us now.

That said, what makes us who we are on earth, including hobbies and pleasures, is not destroyed in heaven, but somehow perfected and raised to higher glories. Exactly what this is like is unknown to us but we can surely presume it is a lot

better than a particularly nice golf course.

## **Communion**

**Question:** I read your response regarding the faithful receiving Communion in both forms, the host and the chalice. I was recently in Europe and, when receiving Communion, the priest takes the host, dips it in the chalice, and then gives Communion to the individual. It seems to me, it would be a very positive way to give Communion in both forms.

– **Alvaro Bettucchi**, San Francisco, California

**Answer:** Yes, what you describe is possible and is called “intinction.” It has been used on a limited basis in recent decades in our Roman rite. While it is permitted, the host must be received on the tongue, not on the hand. And this factor introduces some complexities since some prefer to receive on the hand. Perhaps two different lines can solve the problem, but the overall flow of the Communion line can become difficult to navigate and cause confusion to visitors.

That said, the main point stands: The whole Christ is received in the host alone. Communion under both forms may return, but for now, no one is being deprived of the whole Christ.

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