

ARE IMAGES AND STATUES OF JESUS, SAINTS, ANGELS, OR MARY HELPFUL OR HARMFUL? DO RELICS AND ROSARIES HAVE SPIRITUAL POWER?

The Catholic Blog - Helping people find answers to the most common questions about Catholicism with answers from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Bible.

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Merriam-Webster's Definitions to Consider: How similar are these terms?

Icon - "an object of uncritical devotion; a religious image usually painted on a small wooden panel"

Idol - "an object of extreme devotion; a greatly loved or admired person; a picture or object that is worshipped as a god"

"Are Catholic images helpful or harmful? Do relics and rosaries have power?" -

Important Passages of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* to Consider:

- "in the Old Testament, God ordained or permitted the making of images that pointed symbolically toward salvation by the incarnate Word; so it was with the bronze serpent, the ark of the covenant, and the cherubim" (CCC 2129)
- "the Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. ... 'whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it.' The honor paid to the sacred image is a 'respectful veneration,' not the adoration due to God alone" (CCC 2132)
- "The veneration of sacred images is based on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. **It is not contrary to the first commandment.**" (CCC 2141)
- "Previously God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with men, **I can make an image of what I have seen of God ... and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face unveiled**" (CCC 1159)
- "sacred images of the holy Mother of God and of the saints...truly signify Christ, who is glorified in them...they make manifest the 'cloud of witnesses' who continue to participate in the salvation of the world and to whom we are united...so too are the angels" (CCC 1161)
- "Following the divinely inspired teachings of our holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church (for we know that this tradition comes from the Holy Spirit who dwells in her)...**holy images of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the venerated angels, all the saints and the just, whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls and panels, in houses and on streets**" (CCC 1161)

Merriam-Webster's Definitions to Consider:

Amulet - a small object worn to protect the person wearing it against bad things (such as illness, bad luck, etc.)

Charm - something worn about the person to ward off evil or ensure good fortune

Fetish - an object of irrational reverence or obsessive devotion

“Are Catholic images helpful or harmful? Do relics and rosaries have power?” -

Important Passages of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* to Consider:

- “**Medieval piety in the West developed the prayer of the rosary**” (CCC 2678)
- “Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lector divine* or the rosary” (CCC 2708)
- “The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as **the rosary, an ‘epitome of the whole Gospel,’ express this devotion to the Virgin Mary.**” (CCC 971)
- “**sacramentals...prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it**” (CCC 1670)
- “from the Paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ...all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God” (CCC 1670)
- “among sacramentals, blessings (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first” (CCC 1671)

“Are Catholic images helpful or harmful? Do relics and rosaries have power?” -

Important Scriptures to Consider:

- 2 Kings 18:4–6 And **he broke in pieces the bronze serpent** that Moses had made, for until those days **the people of Israel had made offerings to it** (it was called Nehushtan). [5] He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. [6] For he held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses.” (ESV)
- Jeremiah 3:16–17 “And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. [17] At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.” (ESV)
- Revelation 11:19 “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.”
- Exodus 20:4–5 “**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath,** or that is in the water under the earth. [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me” (ESV)
 - **Why does the Catholic Church combine the 2nd & 1st commandment into just the “first” commandment & then split out the 10th commandment into two?** (CCC 2051)
- Deuteronomy 5:8–10 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. [9] You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, [10] but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (ESV)
- Leviticus 26:1 “You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the LORD your God.” (ESV)
- Deuteronomy 4:16–19 “beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the **form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,** [17] the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, [18] the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. [19] And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host

- of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.” (ESV)
- Micah 5:13 “and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands” (ESV)
 - Psalm 97:7 “All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods!” (ESV)
 - Ezekiel 7:20 “His beautiful ornament they used for pride, and they made their abominable images and their detestable things of it. Therefore I make it an unclean thing to them.” (ESV)
 - Habakkuk 2:18–20 “What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! [19] Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. [20] But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” (ESV)
 - Isaiah 2:8 “Their land is filled with idols; **they bow down to the work of their hands**, to what their own fingers have made.” (ESV)
 - Acts 17:29 “Being then God’s offspring, **we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.**” (ESV)
 - Colossians 2:18 “Let no one disqualify you, **insisting on asceticism and worship of angels**, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind” (ESV)
 - Revelation 13:14 “and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.” (ESV)
 - Revelation 22:8–9 “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, [9] but he said to me, **“You must not do that!** I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.” (ESV)
 - Romans 1:22–25 “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and **exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man** and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (ESV)
 - Ezekiel 13:20–21 “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds. [21] Your veils also I will tear off and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand as prey, and you shall know that I am the LORD. (ESV)
 - Psalm 20:7 “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” (ESV)
 - Acts 5:15 “so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.” (ESV)
 - Acts 19:11–12 “And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, [12] so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.” (ESV)
 - Acts 19:19 “And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.” (ESV)
 - Mark 5:28 “For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’” (ESV)
 - Mark 5:34 “And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’” (ESV)

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Questions to Consider:

- If objects from the Old Testament such as the bronze serpent, the ark of the covenant, and the cherubim were so important for our faith, why do we not have them today?
- **Why did King Hezekiah destroy the bronze serpent in 2 Kings 18:4? How does verses 5 & 6 describe King Hezekiah?**
- **Why is the ark of the covenant now in Heaven and not on earth? (Revelation 11:19)**
- **What does Acts 19:19 teach us about dangers that can be found in objects? When should we get rid of or destroy objects? Why is trust the critical issue?**
- Why did the early church father Eusebius warn against amulets being dangerous? **When can an object like a rosary, relic, statue, or image become more like an amulet in our hearts?**
- Why did people use objects as idols in the Bible? What were they trying to gain? What were they trying to get rid of? When can an object become an idol in our hearts today?
- Why are we warned about putting our trust in objects like horses and chariots (military might) for protection from evil?
- In Acts 5:15-16 was the healing from the proximity to Peter, or from the faith in the Spirit of the Living God that caused them to draw near to Jesus within Peter?
- Did the woman's proximity to Jesus heal her? Did the woman's touching of Jesus heal her? Or was it her faith? Objects and proximity to objects are not needed. Faith in Jesus is what is needed.
- In John 5:1-11 at the Pool of Bethesda Jesus does not choose to heal everyone. Why not?
- Why doesn't Jesus, Peter, or Paul require an offering in return for the healing that came? **Is it wrong for the Church to collect offerings in conjunction with healings?**
- SEE: "What Does the Bible Say about Idols?" www.trustworthyword.com/idols