

Images

“Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image.”

If you look at the context of the commandment, you’ll see that it speaks to worshipping an image. This is wrong because God is invisible and without form. He is so transcendent that even His name is simply “I AM”.

So why do Catholics venerate images? Firstly, it should be said at the beginning that Catholics do not “worship” images. They worship and adore God alone. They venerate and honor saints, regular people (e.g. George Washington or their spouses), relics, altars, flags, etc. This is a very important distinction.

Things have changed since the Old Testament. The Word was made flesh. Christ is the image (Greek: icon) of the Father. God manifested Himself and once and for all in Christ.

The sacred image, the liturgical icon, principally represents Christ. It cannot represent the invisible and incomprehensible God, but the incarnation of the Son of God has ushered in a new “economy” of images. (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1159)

Christ was a true man and able to be depicted. If you took a photo of Christ it would turn out like any other photo. Thus, we can depict Him. And we can depict Mary and the saints with pictures and statues just as we would depict Abraham Lincoln in a memorial or have a picture of our wife on our desk at work.

Moreover, we can show honor to these images – though we may not worship them, because they are no God. We can salute a flag of the USA. We can salute an image of Mary. Mary gave a body and blood to the Christ for our redemption. If we salute a flag that symbolizes the USA, why not salute a picture that symbolizes Mary? Same goes with the cross or even a Bible. We show honor, but we don’t worship. Worship is given to God alone.

The honor paid to sacred images is a “respectful veneration,” not the adoration due to God alone (Catechism of the Catholic Church #3132)

This “respectful veneration” is what Catholics show to the physical signs of redemption in our midst.

God commanded images (two and three dimensional) to adorn His holy temple in the Old Testament. Catholics follow this Old Testament example and the earliest Christian worship places also were decorated with images.

Pictures of Jesus as a boy

Creche statues scene

cross-image

A while ago in Jerusalem I awoke to the loud and intrusive Muslim “call to prayer”, church bells ringing and horns honking. I read this email that came from the United Kingdom...



It read, “Hi Steve! I know you are a busy man. Please answer the above issue when the time permits you. I am a Catholic but I cannot accept the kissing of statues. It goes against my conscience. I feel also it is against the bible teachings. Thanking you and awaiting your reply.”

I responded: Greetings from Jerusalem! I understand your sentiments and I don't make a practice of going around kissing statues either though I have at times and certainly understand the reasoning and sentiment behind the action.



Notice the picture to the left. He is kneeling in front of a Bible. Is the man worshipping the Bible – he is kissing it after all. No, he loves the Word of God and is showing his love for God and his word. It is the same if a man kneels in front of a Bible while reading it.

Imagine your wife, if you're married, is in a different country for a while and you miss her. Every once in a while you take an old picture of your wedding out of your pocket and look at it and think of her and it makes you miss her and love her. Once in a while you might close your eyes and kiss the picture as a means of demonstrating your love and devotion to her and your union together.



It's no different with the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a saint or Jesus. It's simply a way that people acknowledge and express their love and respect for the person behind the statue.



Just like you don't fall in love with a picture and begin to worship the picture of your wife, so Catholics don't love the statue or worship it; they are simply expressing their love and respect for the person behind the statue or that the statute represents.

There's no need to read anything more nefarious into the action than that. It is simply an act of devotion and love for Mary, for Jesus, or for our brothers and sisters the saints who are alive in heaven.

Paragraph 1192 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Through sacred images of the Holy Mother of God, of the angels and of the saints, we venerate the persons represented.” In other words, I as said above, we do not worship the image we love and honor the people they represent.

If you understand it this way you will be understanding it properly and you will do well.