

“What’s up with this pictures of the saints thing?”

As Christians, we are strong believers in asking for help and praying for each other. This concept of community and fellowship was demonstrated numerous times throughout the Bible. In James, we are told to “pray for one another...for the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,” (James 5:16), and we even see that St. Paul does this for the Colossians (Colossians 1:9) and that our Lord Christ Himself prayed for His disciples in John 17. Additionally, we believe that, having been given eternal life in Christ, the body of Christ includes *all* the believers-those present on Earth as well as those present in Heaven. As such, we ask the saints to remember us in their prayers. This does not mean, however, that we must go through the saints to talk to God. This belief is untrue. Our only Mediator with the Father is Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). We include the icons of the saints in a home altar merely as reminders of examples of Godly-lived lives and because they are our friends whom we ask to pray for us. Additionally, the icons of the saints remind us that when we stand to pray, we are entering into Heaven and the presence of Almighty God on His throne, surrounded by the angels and praising Him with the saints. If you would like a more in-depth explanation, have any remaining concerns, or would like some additional resources, please reach out to us or Father Matthias and we’ll be happy to help you. ☺

Additional support for the intercession of the saints

As Orthodox Christians, we strive to practice our Christianity as close to the faith that Christ established 2000 years ago. To do this, we often look back on the writings of the Church fathers, the contemporaries of Christ or His disciples, from the days when the Church was undivided, for wisdom on how to apply our faith. Here’s what

they have to say about asking for the prayers of those Christians who have run the race before us:

- ❖ “As this, O Lord, is the command of Your Only-begotten Son, that we share in the commemoration of Your saints”
- *Liturgy of St. Basil*
- ❖ “We then commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us, first, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, that God, by their prayers and intercessions, may receive our petitions.”
- *St. Cyril of Jerusalem*
- ❖ “We beseech you, O most holy martyrs, who cheerfully suffered torments and death for His love, and are now more familiarly united to Him, that you intercede with God for us slothful and wretched sinners, that He bestow on us the grace of Christ, by which we may be enlightened and enabled to love Him.”
- *St. Cyril the Great*
- ❖ “Ye victorious martyrs who endured torments gladly for the sake of the God and Savior; ye who have boldness of speech towards the Lord Himself; ye saints, intercede for us who are timid and sinful men, full of sloth, that the grace of Christ may come upon us, and enlighten the hearts of all of us that so we may love Him.”
- *St. Ephraim the Syrian*



Home altar project

“Who is the man that has built a new house and has not dedicated it?” (Deuteronomy 20:5)



What is a home altar? What does it look like?

A home altar is a place in the home designated only for prayer. It's called an altar because it's where we offer prayer to God. Regarding what it looks like, home altars differ based on the preference of the individual whose altar it is. It's meant to be a place where we love to pray so it's typically designed in a way that helps us focus on and love prayer. Examples of things usually present include an icon of our Lord Jesus Christ, a cross (one to look at and maybe one to hold in your hand while you pray), a prayer scarf for women, and icons of our favorite saints.

The Importance of a Home Altar

Home altars designate a sacred place in the home where we can be in God's presence every day. This is a concept we are familiar with in our daily lives. In our homes, we have specific places designed for eating, sleeping, showering, etc., so it's only logical to have one for prayer too. This is not to say that a home altar is the only place where we can experience God. In reality, God is present in every aspect of our lives. A home altar is simply a place where the distractions are removed so that we can focus on that fact. Home altars also help reinforce the concept that we, as Christians, live before Christ every day and that we are to give Him a portion of everything in our lives: a part of our time, our home, etc. Home altars are also very useful tools in establishing a regular prayer routine.

Here are some verses supporting establishing a home altar:

- ❖ "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place." (Matthew 6:6)
- ❖ "May my prayer be set before you like incense and the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:2)

- ❖ "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)
- ❖ "Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:24)
- ❖ "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)
- ❖ Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." (Psalm 127:1)

I don't know what to pray with my child...

If you're not used to prayer, it can seem intimidating to start at first. In reality, though, it's as simple as a conversation. Encourage your child to talk to God about what they enjoyed about the day and thank Him for it. Help your child confess things they did wrong in the day and apologize to God and ask for forgiveness. Begin instilling in your child the idea of praying for others. More than the words, we say, God cares about the sincerity of our prayers. The key is just to start. Additionally, we've included some tools that are meant to help our children to practice structured and personal prayer and some tips on how to pray with the home altar supplies that will be handed to the children throughout the year to help with that.

Your Role in the Process

A home altar is meant to be used by the entire family and is a great way to incorporate family prayer into your busy schedules. Also, be creative with the home altar-if you think certain aspects would really benefit you and your child, include them. Lastly, this home altar is not meant to be for your child only, it's for you too. By being involved in setting up your family's home altar, you'll not only be investing in your own spiritual growth and your child's, but also that of your entire home.

Our Role in the Process

Throughout the year, we will periodically be giving your child different components of a home altar, and a spiritual notebook to encourage them to pray. Additionally, we will give them basic instructions on how to use the different components along with a weekly practice in Youth Academy.

"My child is too young for a home altar, isn't this advanced for them?"

You can never start too young. At this age, teaching kids to love God and love talking to Him through prayer is EXTREMELY important for setting foundations that will perpetuate throughout their lives as they grow.

"Why should my daughter cover her head in prayer?"

In 1st Corinthians 11, St. Paul speaks about the necessity of a woman covering her head in prayer. In this passage, he states that "Every woman who prays...with her head uncovered dishonors her head." And that a girl's hair is "a glory to her." He also goes into a discussion about the authority and the origin of man and woman. This passage can be misconstrued to seem that St. Paul states that girls are less than men. This is not the Truth, however. To the contrary, St. Paul is merely discussing that since woman was made from the rib of man, her "origin" is man and therefore, she symbolizes Mankind and the glory of Mankind as a whole. In the awesome presence of God, however, mankind has no glory. As such, a woman-whether young or old-covers her head to symbolically cover the glory of mankind when standing in the presence of God.