

Study Guide: Praying to Mary?

MASTER THEME: In the Bible, God heals, people heal, and God heals through people — so asking a fellow Christian for help, on earth or in heaven, is biblical prayer

THE QUESTION

Picture a prayer gathering where a fellow Catholic prays aloud, “Blessed Mother, please heal me.” Would you correct that person? A typical question from our Protestant friends, asked in good faith, runs this way: “I know that in theory Catholics don’t pray to Mary — but if someone prayed that at your church, would anyone correct them?” The honest Catholic answer: probably not, and for biblical reasons. Start with Romans 8:26 — “we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us.” None of our prayers are perfect, and nobody is called to be the prayer cop. The one praying for us can carry our clumsy request to God rightly, the way a good parent hears a child ask for something the wrong way and simply gets the child what he needs. Mary would do the same: “Lord Jesus, heal him.” So the real question is whether Scripture allows asking a person — any person besides God — for healing. More than twenty verses answer it.

Rom 8:26 — nobody’s prayers are perfect; the Spirit intercedes

Mary carries the prayer to Jesus, like a parent with a child’s request

I. BIG IDEA #1: JESUS GIVES HIS HEALING AUTHORITY AWAY

Jesus is the healer. And he does not keep the work to himself. Matthew 10:1 — he “gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction” (circle “and,” underline “heal”). Matthew 10:8 — “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.” Mark 6:7, 12-13 — sent two by two, “they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.” Luke 9:1-2, 6 — power and authority to cure diseases; “they departed... healing everywhere.” Luke 10:9, 17 — “Heal the sick,” and the seventy-two return rejoicing: “even the demons are subject to us in your name” — underline those last three words. “In the name” means acting as though Jesus himself were doing it, the way a deputy knocks and says “open in the name of the law”: deputized, carrying the authority of another. And Mark 16:17-18 widens the scope past the apostles: “these signs will accompany those who believe... they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” The Bible is not working overtime to protect Jesus from other people doing what only he can do. Jesus hands the authority out.

Matt 10:1 — authority to heal EVERY disease. Every means every

“In your name” = as though Jesus himself were doing it (the deputy)

Mark 16:17-18 — not just apostles: those who BELIEVE

II. BIG IDEA #2: ACTS — THE NARRATORS MOVE ALL OVER THE MAP

Watch how Luke talks. Sometimes God heals, sometimes the person heals, sometimes God heals through the person — and Scripture never stops to apologize for any of the three. Acts 3:6-8 — Peter: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Acts 5:12, 15-16 — signs done “by the hands of the apostles”; the sick carried into the streets so Peter’s shadow might fall on them, “and they were all healed.” Acts 6:8 — “Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs” (underline “full of grace”). Acts 8:6-7 — the crowds “saw the signs that he did” — Philip did. Acts 9:17-18 — Ananias lays hands on Saul for sight and the Holy Spirit. Acts 9:33-34 — “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you” — amen, and not without Peter saying it. Acts 9:40-41 — Peter turns to a dead body and says “Tabitha, arise.” Acts 14:3 — wonders “done by their hands.” Acts 14:8-10 — Paul sees that a man has faith to be made well and commands him to stand. Acts 19:11-12 — “God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,” down to handkerchiefs and aprons that touched his skin. People and things, people and things — that is how the God of the Bible works in a world of people and things. Acts 20:9-12 — Eutychus falls dead, and Paul raises him. Who did it? God did, and Paul did. The Catholic refuses the word “or” here, because Luke refuses it. And Acts 28:8-9 — Paul heals the father of Publius, “and the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.” They came to Paul. Nobody says, “why are you coming to me — go only to Jesus.” They came, and they were cured.

Three voices in one book: God heals / the person heals / God heals through

Peter’s shadow, Paul’s handkerchiefs — people AND things

Acts 28:9 — the whole island came to Paul, and no one corrected them

III. BIG IDEA #3: THE CHURCH'S STANDING ORDERS

James 5:14-15 is the standing instruction for sick Christians, and it does not read "let him pray to Jesus alone." It reads: "Is any one among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up." The sick person asks other Christians to get involved, those Christians act in the name of the Lord, their prayer saves the sick man, and the Lord raises him up — all four in two verses, with no contradiction anywhere. Verse 16 adds that the prayer of a righteous person has great power. Catholics believe that about the pastor down the street and about the saints in the presence of God, because it is one church in heaven and on earth, and the righteous in heaven are more righteous now, not less.

Jas 5:14 — "call for the elders," the Bible's own instruction for the sick

The prayer of faith saves AND the Lord raises him up — both, together

IV. BIG IDEA #4: BUT HOW CAN MARY HEAR MILLIONS OF PRAYERS?

Protestants may respond: "God can hear every prayer because he's God. But Mary is a creature. What are the logistics? Has she been made superhuman?" A fair question, and Scripture answers it. First, God already gives ordinary, fallen Christians abilities beyond human capacity — 1 Corinthians 12 lists nine things done "by the Spirit": heal a sickness, know otherwise unknowable things, receive wisdom, work a miracle, discern spirits, speak a language never learned, interpret a language never learned, speak words from God, and receive faith for what that faith must accomplish. That list was written to the carnal, struggling Corinthians, not to glorified saints. Second, the Catholic view of salvation runs from less to more: God uses us imperfectly now, and perfectly once we are with him, no longer limited by dying bodies. Third, the Bible shows a man doing the very thing the question asks about: John, not yet resurrected or glorified, stands in the heavenly throne room and hears every creature "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" praising at once — and understands them all as one voice (Revelation 5:13). If John could do it for a moment, the saints at home there do it all the time. How? "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," and "then I shall know even as I am known" (1 Jn. 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:12). Think of a man who flew from Virginia to San Diego. Can he fly? No — but in the airplane and with the airplane, he participates in flight without ever becoming an airplane. The saint is not God and not a sub-deity; the saint is in Christ, and participates in what Christ does. That is what "partakers of the divine nature" means (2 Pet. 1:4) — and eye has not seen what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9).

1 Cor 12 — nine Spirit-given abilities past human capacity, given to sinners NOW

From less to more: imperfect collaboration here, perfect collaboration there

Rev 5:13 — John hears every language as one voice. The saints live there

The airplane: in it and with it, you fly — without becoming it

THE ANSWER: *Would a well-taught Catholic correct "Blessed Mother, please heal me"? No — and the reasons run through the whole New Testament. Jesus gave his disciples authority to heal every disease (Matt. 10:1, 8; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:9, 17), widened it to believers as such (Mark 16:17-18), and Acts shows the result in three registers used interchangeably: God heals, people heal, God heals through people — Peter's word, Peter's shadow, Philip's signs, Ananias's hands, Paul's handkerchiefs, a whole island coming to one apostle (Acts 3-28). James tells the sick to call for the elders, whose prayer of faith saves while the Lord raises up (Jas. 5:14-16). The one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) distributes his own work through his body; asking a fellow Christian for healing is how Scripture itself shows the thing being done. And the saints in heaven can hear such requests because God already gives his people abilities beyond nature in this life (1 Cor. 12), salvation moves from less to more, and in the throne room every tongue is heard as one voice — John did it unglorified (Rev. 5:13). The one who asks "Blessed Mother, please heal me" understands something true: only God heals, and he almost never does it alone. He works through people — on earth, and at home with him.*