

SCULPTURE AND STATUARY

Catholic churches have many features that make them different from other churches. One thing that many people notice is the presence of statues. These statues can be of many different religious figures. In all Catholic churches, there will be at least one crucifix that has on it the figure of Jesus. This will usually be displayed in a prominent position in the church.

In most Catholic churches, there will also be a statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus.



There will also often be a statue of Jesus, called the 'Sacred Heart' that shows the heart of Jesus burning with love. In addition to these three most common statues, there might well be other statues of saints, especially of the saint after whom the church is named.



In many Catholic churches, these statues will have in front of them places to kneel and places to light candles to leave as physical symbols of prayer intentions. Catholics often kneel in front of statues to pray. The presence of statues in Catholic churches as a focus for prayer and devotion is common and unremarkable to most Catholics, but for many other Christians it is an unusual practice and one with which many would disagree.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STATUES FOR CATHOLICS

Catholics would say that the presence of Catholics in churches is just one way in which they express a deeper commitment to what they call an 'incarnational view' of the world. Remember, the incarnation is the belief that God took on a physical form and lived in the real world when he became a human being in Jesus. For Catholics, this means that physical things are good and that God can make himself known to human beings through the ordinary physical things around us. This is why so much of Catholic worship is centred on ordinary, physical signs of God's extraordinary presence – oil, water, bread, wine, colours, incense, music, and so on. For Catholic Christians, statues are just another sign of the reality of the incarnation ('made flesh' The Christian belief that God became man in the person of Jesus, fully human and fully divine.)



The Crucifix

The one statue that will be present in every Catholic church is the crucifix. This is a directly incarnational image since it is an image of Jesus himself whom Catholics believe became incarnate in order to save people from their sins. The crucifix is the most common focus for Catholic prayer and it reminds believers of the incarnation, but also of the suffering of Jesus which, for Catholics, is a reminder of God's love for them.

Do Statues Break the Commandment to Worship God Alone?

Making religious statues goes against the second commandment that forbids the making of any image as an object of worship. By worshipping statues, Catholics are worshipping 'false gods'.



Jews do not use statues as a focus for prayer as it goes against the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:4-5). Synagogues therefore do not have any representations of God as he is above human understanding.



Catholics argue statues are reminders of Jesus and God and help them focus their prayers. Well...that would be a good argument if the statues were only statues of Jesus, but they are often of other holy men and women, such as Mary and the saints. Offering prayers to anyone or anything other than God is breaking the first commandment to worship God alone.



Catholics don't pray to the statues. They are just reminders of God and Jesus and these help us to focus our prayers on what really matters. Statues are like photographs of loved ones – the photographs are only important to us because they remind us of the people we love. We don't love photographs; we love the people in the photographs.



Catholics don't worship Mary and the saints but rather ask Mary and the saints to INTERCEDE on our behalf and pray to God for us, just like we often ask other living people to pray for us and will offer to pray for them too – just like many Christians. Catholics believe that we are part of something called 'the communion of saints', all believers, both living and dead, are part of this communion and we believe that the saints in heaven offer prayers to God for those on earth. So we're just asking the saints to pray for us, not worshipping false gods.

Intercede
- To act on behalf of someone else



Catholics use statues in their worship as a reminder of God and as a focus for prayers; statues are not worshipped.

Some other Christians believe that using statues in worship is against the Ten Commandments.

Jews reject the use of statues or any images of humans in synagogues and would never represent God because God is beyond human understanding.

The Pieta is a statue of the death of Jesus that many Catholics find helpful in helping them to respond to human suffering.

SUMMARY

Knowledge Check

Answer in full sentences or copy out the question.

1. What noticeably makes Catholic churches different to other Christian churches?
2. Give three examples of statues commonly found in Catholic churches.
3. What is the statue showing the heart of Jesus burning with love known as?
4. What stance will Catholics typically take while praying in front of these statues?
5. Why do many Christians disagree with the use of statues?
6. Which commandment does the use of statues go against?
7. What is meant by 'incarnation'?
8. Name three things used in Catholic worship to signify God's extraordinary presence
9. Why is the crucifix important to many Catholics?
10. How might a Catholic person and a Jewish person disagree over the use of statues?

Choose a Task

1. Design a multiple choice quiz on the topic of Statues.
2. Design a detailed mind map outlining the use of Statues.
3. Design a detailed visual poster outlining the use of Statues.

Exam Question

Write an extended answer to the question below.

Describe the different types of statues found in a Catholic church

Discuss the statement showing that you have thought of more than one point of view.

For each sentence, use PEEA (Point, Evidence, Explain, Analysis).
For example:
P – Make your point
E – Back it up with evidence or examples
E – Explanation (link back to the statement)
A – Say what is good or bad about the point you have just made

