

HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME A SAINT?

A 5-STEP PROCESS

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Usually, people want to know the answer to this question because they want to know the process for how someone is canonized within the Catholic Church. But, before we do this, it may be helpful to see the Church's vision for sainthood.

To answer the question directly, the Catholic Church believes that anyone can become a saint—that is someone who makes it to heaven. Whether you are a priest, a single man, a religious sister, etc., the Catholic Church calls all men and women, whatever their state in life, to seek holiness and sainthood. This idea has been given more attention recently and maybe most significantly during Vatican II and the release of the document *Lumen Gentium* that outlined what the Catholic Church calls the Universal Call to Holiness.

WHY DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CHOOSE ONE PERSON OVER ANOTHER TO BE A SAINT?

Sometimes we can casually say that the Church is making him or her a saint. But, technically, the Church does not make saints; it recognizes someone who is in heaven. In addition to this, the Church is looking for folks whose lives are worth imitating and to such a degree that they should be held up as an example to the Church. Knowing these criteria can help people understand the process for how the Catholic Church recognizes saints.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF BEING RECOGNIZED AS A SAINT IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

This is probably the question most people are really asking when they are asking: How does someone become a saint? Here are the five steps.

5 STEPS TO SAINTHOOD

First, the person's local bishop investigates their life by gathering information from witnesses of their life and any writings they may have written. If the bishop finds them to be worthy of being a saint, then he submits the information that he gathered to the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Second, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints can choose to reject the application or accept it and begin their own investigation of the person's life. If the application is accepted, the person may be called *Servant of God*.

Third, if the Congregation for the Causes of Saints approves of the candidate, they can choose to declare that the person lived a life heroically virtuous life. This isn't a declaration that the person is in heaven, but that they pursued holiness while here on earth. If this is indeed found to be the case, the person may be called *Venerable*.

Fourth, to be recognized as someone in heaven requires that a miracle has taken place through the intercession of that person. The miracle is usually a healing. The healing has to be instantaneous, permanent, and complete while also being scientifically unexplainable. Miracles have to be first verified as scientifically unexplainable by a group of independent doctors, then the person is approved by a panel of theologians, and then the final approval lies with the pope. If this is the case, a person is declared a blessed.

Note: Besides the number of miracles attributed to them, *the difference between is a blessed and a saint* is that the scope of devotion for a blessed is narrower – usually limited to a specific group of people or a particular region of the world while a saint is held up for devotion for the universal Church.

Fifth, a second miracle is needed in order to declare someone a *saint*. The confirmation of a second miracle goes through the same scrutiny as the first.

The five-step process is a general outline for how someone becomes a saint. There are definitely exceptions to this process and situations that may change the process as well.

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