

Saints

Introduction

All Christians are called to be saints. Saints are persons in heaven (officially canonized or not), who lived heroically virtuous lives, offered their life for others, or were martyred for the faith, and who are worthy of imitation.

In official Church procedures there are three steps to sainthood: a candidate becomes "Venerable," then "Blessed" and then "Saint." Venerable is the title given to a deceased person recognized formally by the pope as having lived a heroically virtuous life or offered their life. To be beatified and recognized as a Blessed, one miracle acquired through the candidate's intercession is required in addition to recognition of heroic virtue or offering of life.

Canonization requires a second miracle after beatification. The pope may waive these requirements. A miracle is not required prior to a martyr's beatification, but one is required before canonization.

Key Terms

Beatification -- the second stage in the process of proclaiming a person a saint; occurs after a diocese or eparchy and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints has conducted a rigorous investigation into the person's life and writings to determine whether he or she demonstrates a heroic level of virtue, offered their life or suffered martyrdom. A miracle attributed to the person's intercession must be proved.

Blessed -- title bestowed on a person who has been beatified and accorded limited liturgical veneration.

Canonization – the formal process by which the Church declares a person to be a saint and worthy of universal veneration.

Congregation for the Causes of Saints – a department of the Roman Curia, established originally as the Congregation of Rites by Pope Sixtus V in 1588. Reorganized and renamed in 1969 by Pope Paul VI, and again in 1983 by Pope John Paul II. Some of the responsibilities of the Congregation include making recommendations to the pope on beatifications and canonizations, and the authentication and preservation of sacred relics.

Miracle – something that has occurred by the grace of God through the intercession of a Venerable, or Blessed which is scientifically inexplicable.

Petitioner – party initiating an action in canon law. In the case of a sainthood cause, the petitioner is one who asks the diocesan bishop to begin the investigation which could ultimately lead to canonization. (A bishop may also begin a cause on his own initiative, in which case he is the petitioner.)

Positio – a comprehensive summary of all documentation; in this context, there are two: the one summarizing the investigation of a candidate's life and heroic virtues or offering of life, or martyrdom and a second for any alleged miracles. The *Positio* is prepared during the Roman phase by the postulator with the assistance of someone from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Postulator – person appointed to guide and oversee the cause. One oversees the cause at the diocesan or eparchial level (Phase I); the Roman postulator, oversees all aspects of Phases II and III.

Prefect – the head of any of the Roman curial congregations, usually a cardinal.

Relator – person appointed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to assemble the historic documentation of the candidate for canonization.

Saint – the title given to someone who has been formally canonized by the Church as sharing eternal life with God, and therefore offered for public veneration and imitation.

Servant of God – the title given to a candidate for sainthood whose cause is still under investigation, prior to being declared Venerable.

Venerable – the title given to a candidate for sainthood whose cause has not yet reached the beatification stage but whose heroic virtue has been declared by the pope.

History In the first five centuries of the Church, the process for recognizing a saint was based on public acclaim or the *vox populi, vox Dei* (voice of the people, voice of God). There was no formal canonical process as understood by today's standards. Beginning in the sixth century and continuing into the twelfth century, the intervention of the local bishop was required before someone could be canonized. The intervention of the local bishop usually began with a request from the local community for the bishop to recognize someone a saint. Upon studying the request and a written biography, if he found it favorable, the bishop would typically issue a decree, legitimize the liturgical cult and thereby canonize the person.

Starting in the tenth century, a cause proceeded with the usual steps, i.e. the person's reputation would spread, a request to the local bishop from the people to declare the person a saint occurred, and a biography would be written for the bishop's review. Now however, the bishop would collect eyewitness testimony of those who knew the person and who had witnessed miracles, and he would provide a summary of the case to the Pope for his approval. The Pope then reviewed the cause, and if he approved it, he issued a decree declaring the person a canonized saint. The first documented case

of papal invention is by Pope John XV on January 31, 993 for the canonization of St. Ulric. When Pope Sixtus V reorganized the Roman Curia in 1588 he established the Congregation for Sacred Rites. One of its functions was to assist the Pope with reviewing causes. Except for a few canonical developments, from 1588 the process of canonization remained the same until 1917 when a universal Code of Canon Law was promulgated.

The 1917 code contained 145 canons (cc. 1999- 2144) on causes of canonization, and mandated that an episcopal process and an apostolic process be conducted. The episcopal process consisted of the local bishop verifying the reputation of the person, ensuring that a biography existed, collecting eye witness testimony and the person's written works. All of this was then forwarded to the Congregation for Sacred Rites. The apostolic process consisted of reviewing the evidence submitted, collecting more evidence, studying the cause, investigating any alleged miracles and ultimately forwarding the cause to the Pope for his approval. This process remained in effect until 1983 with the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and new norms for causes of canonization: *Divinus Perfectionis Magister, Normae Servandae in Inquisitionibus ab Episcopis Faciendis in Causis Sanctorum* and *Sanctorum Mater* (2007). This revised process for causes of canonization is still in force and is detailed below.

No precise count exists of those who have been proclaimed saints since the first centuries. However, in 1988, to mark its 4th centenary, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints published the first "Index ac Status Causarum." This book and its subsequent supplements, written entirely in Latin, are considered the definitive index of all causes that have been presented to the Congregation since its institution.

American Saints, Blesseds and Venerables The American Church has been blessed with numerous Saints, Blesseds and Venerables, all of whom in their own unique way witness to Christ's love through their martyrdom or virtuous lives within our American culture. Currently, there are eleven American Saints:

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, St. Marianne Cope, St. Katharine Drexel, St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, St. Mother Théodore Guérin, St. Isaac Jogues and the North American Martyrs, St. John Neumann, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Father Junípero Serra, O.F.M., St. Kateri Tekakwitha, and St. Damien de Veuster (canonized as Damien of Moloka'i). There are two American Blesseds: Blessed Father Francis Xavier Seelos, C.Ss.R., and Blessed Sister Miriam Teresa, S.C. (Teresa Demjanovich). There are fourteen American Venerables: Venerable Father Nelson Baker, Venerable Bishop Frederic Baraga, Venerable Mother Mary Magdalen Bentivoglio, O.S.C., Venerable Father Solanus Casey, O.F.M. Cap., Venerable Cornelia Connelly, S.H.C.J., Venerable Henriette Delille, S.S.F., Venerable Mother Mary Theresa Dudzik, O.S.F., Venerable Bishop Alphonse Gallegos, O.A.R., Venerable Mother Maria Kaupas, S.S.C., Venerable Mother Mary Angeline Teresa McCrory, O. Carm., Venerable Father Michael McGivney, Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen, Venerable Pierre Toussaint, and Venerable Father Felix Varela

Stage I – Examining the Life of a Candidate for Sainthood

Phase 1: Diocesan or Eparchial Level

Five years must pass from the time of a candidate's death before a cause may begin. This is to allow greater balance and objectivity in evaluating the case and to let the emotions of the moment dissipate. The pope can dispense from this waiting period.

The bishop of the diocese or eparchy in which the person died is responsible for beginning the investigation. The petitioner (who for example can be the diocese/eparchy, bishop, religious order or association of the faithful) asks the bishop through a person known as the postulator to open the investigation.

The bishop then begins a series of consultations with the episcopal conference, the faithful of his diocese or eparchy and the Holy See. Once these consultations are done and he has received the 'nihil obstat' of the Holy See, he forms a diocesan or eparchial tribunal. The tribunal will investigate the martyrdom or how the candidate lived a life of heroic virtues, that is, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, and others specific to his or her state in life. Witnesses will be called and documents written by and about the candidate must be gathered and examined.

Phase II: Congregation for the Causes of Saints

Once the diocesan or eparchial investigation is finished, the documentation is sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The postulator for this phase, residing in Rome, under the direction of a member of the Congregation's staff called a relator prepares the 'Positio,' or summary of the documentary evidence from the diocesan or eparchial phase in order to prove the heroic exercise of virtue or the martyrdom.

The 'Positio' undergoes an examination by nine theologians who vote on whether or not the candidate lived a heroic life or suffered martyrdom. If the majority of the theologians are in favor, the cause is passed on for examination by cardinals and bishops who are members of the Congregation.

If their judgment is favorable, the prefect of the Congregation presents the results of the entire course of the cause to the pope, who gives his approval and authorizes the Congregation to draft a decree declaring one Venerable if they have lived a virtuous life or a Blessed if they have been martyred.

Stage II – Beatification For the beatification of a Venerable, a miracle attributed to his intercession, verified after his death, is necessary. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation, following a procedure analogous to that for heroic virtues. This investigation too is concluded with the appropriate decree. Once the decree on the miracle is promulgated the pope grants the beatification, which is the concession of limited public veneration – usually only in the diocese, eparchy, region, or religious community in which the Blessed lived. With beatification the candidate receives the titled of Blessed. For a martyr, no miracle is required. Thus when the pope approves the positio declaring that the person was a martyred for the faith, the title Blessed is granted to the martyr at that time.

Stage III – Canonization For canonization another miracle is needed for both Blessed martyrs and Blesseds who lived a virtuous life, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after his or her beatification. The methods for affirming the miracle are the same as those followed for beatification. Canonization allows for the public veneration of the Saint by the Universal Church. With canonization, the Blessed acquires the title of Saint.

Sources:

Adapted from "Canonical procedure for causes of saints," Vatican Information Service, Sept. 12, 1997; and from "Saints in the Catholic Church," Vatican Information Service, July 29, 1997.

<https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints>