



## **BACKGROUND**

### **Making Saints and Relics**

All Christians are candidates for sainthood. At one time only martyrs were considered for sainthood. However, since before the fourth century, all persons in heaven who lived lives of great charity and held Christian heroic virtues worthy of imitation are candidates for sainthood.

From all walks of life and from different times in history, the trend today is to honour individuals who were active in the world of family, business and politics and showed themselves to be holy in a secular world. These men and women provide an example of overcoming hardship and living a Christian lifestyle worthy of imitation and by relating to their challenges and following their example we open the way of holiness for us.

The Canonization process consists of three steps. A pope has the ability to waive the requirement of a miracle being required prior to a martyr's beatification, but one is required before canonization.

**Venerable** – this is the title given to a deceased person formally recognized by the pope, after review from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, as having lived a life of heroic virtues or martyrdom.

**Blessed** – once it is established that the individual has met the requirements and is considered a Venerable, to be beatified and recognized a Blessed, one miracle must be acquired through the candidate's intercession. This is a lengthy process of scrutiny.

**Saint** – in order to be made a Saint, Canonization requires that a second miracle take place after the Beatification.

### **Relics of Saints**

Relics are objects associated with Saints.

**First Class** – an actual body or part of a body

**Second Class** – an article of clothing or some other object used by a saint

**Third Class** – any object that has touched a first class relic

### **Number of Saints Canonized**

By Pope John Paul II 482

By Pope Benedict XVI 14\*

## **Four stages on the Road to Sainthood**

### **Stage One**

#### **Examining the Life of the Candidate for Sainthood**

For a candidate's cause for sainthood to begin, five years must pass from the time of their death. This is to allow time to gain greater objectivity in evaluating the case. The waiting period is not mandatory and can be dispensed by the Pope which is evaluated on a case by case basis.

The cause for sainthood is started by the local Bishop where the candidate died. Often this bishop will consult with his fellow bishops to solicit their opinions on the merit and timeliness of introducing the cause. Once the decision to proceed is made, the local bishop asks Rome to open the investigation. Once permission is granted and an investigation is opened, a '*nihil obstat*' is obtained from the Holy See and a diocesan tribunal is set up. Witnesses are then called to recount concrete facts regarding the Christian virtues which made the candidate an outstanding role model of the faith. In addition to this recounting, all documents written by and about the candidate are gathered and examined and the general public is petitioned asking for anyone with knowledge of the candidate to come forward.

### **Stage Two**

#### **Congregation for the Causes of Saints**

Once the diocesan investigation has concluded, the documentation is sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. Here a public copy of the information is put together which summarizes the heroic exercise of virtue or martyrdom of the individual. This summary then is examined by nine theologians who give their vote. If the majority of theologians are in favour, the cause is passed on for examination by the Congregation's Cardinals and Bishops. If their judgment is favourable, the prefect of the Congregation presents the results to the pope who gives his approval and authorizes the congregation to draft a decree. At this stage the candidate becomes "Venerable".

### **Stage Three**

#### **Beatification**

For a Venerable to become beatified "Servant of God", a miracle must be attributed to his/her intercession. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation following a similar procedure to that for heroic virtues. If authenticated, a decree is granted. Once the two decrees are granted (regarding the heroic virtues/martyrdom and the miracle) the Holy Father decides on beatification, giving the candidate the title "Blessed". This title allows for limited public veneration, often limited to the diocese, region, or religious community in which the Servant of God lived.

### **Stage Four**

#### **Canonization**

For canonization another miracle is needed, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after his/her beatification. This miracle is verified in the same way as done for the beatification. Canonization is required for the public veneration in the Universal Church and with Canonization, the Blessed acquires the title of Saint.

## Saints - Key Terms

**Beatification** – Stage III in the process of sainthood which occurs after a diocese and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints have conducted a rigorous investigation into the person's life and writings to determine whether he or she demonstrates a heroic level of virtue or suffered martyrdom. In order for an individual to be Beatified, a miracle must be attributed to the person's intercession.

**Blessed** – This is a title that is given to a person who has been beatified.

**Canonization** – Is the formal process where the Church declares a person to be a saint.

**Congregation for the Causes of Saints** – Is a department of the Roman Curia. In addition to making recommendations to the pope on beatifications and canonizations, it is also responsible for the authentication and preservation of sacred relics.

**Miracle** - An event that can be witnessed by the senses but is in apparent contradiction to the laws of nature. The Church recognizes authentic miracles as a divine intervention in the sensible world.

**Petitioner** – In Church or Canon Law, it is the party initiating an action. In the case of sainthood, the petitioner is one who asks the bishop to begin the investigation of an individual which may lead to canonization.

**Positio** – Is the comprehensive summary of all documentation prepared by the postulator, defined below. In the case of sainthood, this comes in two ways – the summary of the investigation of a candidate's life and heroic virtues or martyrdom and secondly, the summary of any alleged miracles.

**Postulator** – A person who is appointed to guide and oversee the cause for sainthood. In the case of sainthood there are two – the one who oversees the cause at the diocesan level, Stage I, and the second being a resident of Rome and appointed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to oversee all aspects of Stages II and III.

**Prefect** – Usually a Cardinal, the prefect is the head of any of the pontifical congregations.

**Relator** – a person who is appointed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, who works closely in Stage II with the Postulator, to assemble the historic documentation of the particular location or era of the candidate.

**Saint** – The title given to someone who has been formally canonized by the Church.

**Servant of God** – Is the title given to a candidate for sainthood whose cause is still under investigation, prior to beatification.

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

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Sources

USCCB – Making Saints

The Catholic Source Book

Encyclopedia of Catholicism

Ask a Catholic by Fr. Victor Hoagland, C.P. [www.cptryon.org](http://www.cptryon.org)

[www.gcatholic.com](http://www.gcatholic.com)