

# Canonization of Saints

The veneration of saints has been a common practice since the early church, but it was only gradually that the identification of who is a saint came to be regulated by bishops and the pope. Beginning in the 10th century, the Roman Catholic Church asserted that no one could be venerated as a saint without its approval. The first recorded **canonization of a saint** is Ulrich of Augsburg by Pope John XV in 993.

The process of canonization became a part of canon law in the Roman Catholic Church and developed into a long and complex process. This process was simplified by the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* of January 25, 1983.

Other churches, particularly the Orthodox and Anglican churches, also honor saints and have their own systems for canonizing saints who lived after their splits with the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches share common saints from before 1000 AD.



# The Significance of Canonization

The primary purpose of canonization is to officially authorize veneration of and prayer to a particular deceased person. The investigation process that precedes canonization seeks primarily to ensure that the person is in heaven and God is working through him or her.

*Being canonized as a saint means that:*

- The saint's name is added to the official catalogue of saints (meaning that veneration is authorized)
- The saint is invoked in public prayers
- Churches may be dedicated in the saint's memory
- The Mass can be offered in the saint's honor
- Feast days are celebrated in the saint's memory
- Images of the saint are made in which his or her head is surrounded by a halo
- The saint's relics (remains) are enclosed in vessels and publicly honored.



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# The Importance of Miracles

If a person is martyred for the faith, miracles are not necessary to be declared a saint. As mentioned above, the purpose of canonization is to verify that the person is now in heaven, and all those who die as martyrs are believed to go directly to heaven.

For those who died naturally, however, at least one miracle is necessary to be declared Blessed (beatified) and at least two miracles are necessary to be declared a saint (canonized). These miracles must have occurred after the person's death (to demonstrate that the person is in heaven and able to assist the living), but miracles during his or her lifetime may also be taken into account as evidence of God's favor.

When considering a reported miracle, the Church often consults with medical, scientific and theological experts to see if there might be alternative explanations. If the experts can find no explanation, they report that to the Church (they do not declare the event to be a miracle, just that they could find no natural explanation).



# The Process of Canonization

The process of declaring a deceased Christian to be saint was originally quite informal, but became increasingly regulated over the centuries and is now defined by canon law. The steps for becoming a saint are as follows:

- 1) Usually between 5 and 50 years after a would-be saint's death, a formal request is made to consider the person a saint. The group making the request, called the *Actor Causae*, consists of people from the candidate's church and community, and the request is directed to the bishop of the diocese where the person died. The request includes testimony of the person's exceptional virtue and dedication to God.
- 2) The bishop decides whether the evidence is compelling enough to take it to Rome. If so, he asks the **Congregation for the Causes of Saints** for permission to open the cause.
- 3) If permission is granted, the bishop opens a tribunal and calls witnesses to attest to the quality of the person's public life. The person must be shown to have been virtuous, devout, religious, and characterized by love, kindness, prudence and other virtues (concrete examples are required). Miracles are not necessary at this point, but they are recorded if mentioned. If the person passes this step, he or she is called a **Servant of God**.



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- 4) The bishop sends a report to Rome, where it is translated into Italian. This step is called the *Apostolic Process*.
- 5) A summary called the *Positio* is presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the local bishop appoints a postulator to be in charge of promoting the cause of the potential saint.
- 6) Nine theologians scrutinize the evidence and documentation. If the majority pass it, it goes before the cardinals who are members of the Congregation.
- 7) If the cardinals approve, the Prefect of the Congregation authorizes the person to be called **Venerable**.
- 8) If any miracles are reported (which qualify the person for beatification or canonization), the Prefect presents the cause to the pope to decide.
- 9) The pope authorizes a potential saint to be beatified (publicly declared blessed) when at least one miracle has been confirmed. The person may now be called **Blessed**.
- 10) When a second miracle has been confirmed the pope formally canonizes the person at a special Mass, usually celebrated by the pope in Rome. The person may now officially be called **Saint**.



# Ceremony of Canonization

The formal declaration of beatification or canonization occurs during a special Mass conducted by the pope. It usually takes place outdoors in St. Peter's Square before large crowds, but sometimes is conducted in the saint's home country. In 2001, over a half million people attended the canonization of Padre Pio (1887-1968).

The canonization ceremony is conducted as follows:

- The saint's life history is read aloud.
- The pope chants the following in Latin:

**In honor of the Blessed Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith and the growth of Christian life, with the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul and Our Own, after lengthy reflection, having assiduously invoked God's assistance and taken into account the opinion of many brothers of ours in the episcopate, we declare and define [name] to be a saint [or "to be blessed"], and we enroll him in the Catalogue of the saints, and we establish that in the whole Church he should be devoutly honored among the saints. In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

- The person is officially recognized as blessed or as a saint at this point. A large tapestry with an image of the saint is unfurled before the faithful to admire and venerate.





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