

*the Sacred Rites*, later renamed the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and became responsible for the canonization process. As procedures were created and refined, each cause took on the look of a court room trial. A *Promoter of Faith*, representing the Church, emerged as a prominent figure in the courtroom model. Arguing and even attacking the cause, this person became known as the *Devil's Advocate*. He was specifically designated to not only find fault with the cause but also to produce witnesses that could negate the candidate's sanctity. The resulting arguments between the Promoter of Faith and the Postulator could go on for months. Once the sanctity of the person was proven, two miracles for beatification and two more for canonization were required. Equally time-consuming was the Vatican rechecking of the facts previously investigated by the local diocese.

These exhausting procedures remained in place until 1983 when John Paul II streamlined the process. The courtroom model and role of the fault-finding devil's advocate were eliminated, no longer was the diocese investigation double checked, the number of miracles was reduced from four to two, and the time to open a cause after death was reduced from fifty to five years. The whole process shifted from a judicial like system to one of academic design and atmosphere. History will eventually show the impact of the 1983 changes; however, because canonization is the highest honor the Church can give, it will never be a quick process. That the Church proceeds carefully is exemplified by Saint Martin de Porres who died in 1639, was beatified in 1837 and canonized in 1962. Considered among the

quickest canonizations was that of Saint Therese of Lisieux which took 28 years following her death. Such periods of evaluation are not exceptions. Waiving the wait time to open a cause for canonization, such as the recent cases with Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, is rare indeed.

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## **What Is Canonization?**

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The process used to declare someone a saint is called *canonization*. While there are over 10,000 saints, only 3,000 have been named through this official Catholic Church process. The term "canonization" means to be added to the list, so that when the Pope canonizes someone, he is adding that name to a list known as the Canon of Saints. The process includes the steps of being identified as a Venerable, a Blessed, and a Saint; it is a lengthy, detailed and not widely understood process.

The process begins when members of the laity or a religious institute, believing someone in their order or diocese lived the life of a saint, petitions the local bishop to open a *Cause* for canonization. In accordance with Church norms, the candidate must be deceased for at least five years. If the bishop agrees with the petition, he will collaborate with other bishops and notify the Holy See of his intent to open the cause and initiate an investigation. Vatican files are then researched for anything that could eliminate the candidate from consideration.

The petitioner, in concert with the bishop, appoints someone to direct the cause. This person, known as the *Postulator* will be responsible to collect evidence, establish the candidate's reputation for sanctity, defend and, if necessary, deny the cause. Well-versed in theological, canonical and historical matters, the Postulator will often take up residence in Rome where he can remain in contact with Vatican officials. Once the cause is opened, the candidate may be referred to as the *Servant of God*. The focus of this diocese investigation is to prove the Servant of God lived a life of heroic virtue, that is, habitually practiced the cardinal

virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance as well as the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. The candidate's writings and personal papers are critically reviewed to determine if there are any views contrary to Christian values or Church teachings. Places where the person lived and died are visited; family and friends are interviewed. The bishop selects a tribunal of Church experts to examine all the evidence, question witnesses, both for and against the cause, and judge the holiness of the candidate. When this detailed investigation is completed, and the bishop is satisfied, all the documentation is forwarded to the Holy See.

At the Vatican, the investigation results are received by the *Congregation for the Causes of Saints*, a dicastery or department responsible for all aspects of the saint-making process and that works closely with the Postulator. The Postulator's primary collaborator from the Congregation is the *Relator*. This official studies the evidence on behalf of the Congregation and while he may challenge any information, his focus is on advancing the cause.

The primary responsibility of the Relator and his associates is to coordinate with the Postulator and prepare a position paper called the *Positio*. The completed Positio is a voluminous evidentiary document used in all decision-making by the Congregation. It contains a biography of the candidate, results of the diocese investigation, other documents supporting the candidate's holiness, eyewitness testimonies and a summary of all the evidence. The purpose of the Positio is to show clear and convincing evidence that the Servant of God lived a life of extraordinary holiness. The Positio is scrutinized by the Relator, the Postulator, and then a group of theologian consultants. If the theologians agree the Positio is complete and convincing, it is next sent to a board of cardinals and bishops who are members of the

Congregation. A favorable decision by this group means the cause can be presented to the Pope. The Holy Father being convinced that the Servant of God lived a life of heroic virtue and exemplary holiness, can declare the person *Venerable*. This declaration is a formal announcement by the Church that the candidate is being considered for sainthood. The next step is *beatification*.

For beatification and eventual canonization, a total of two miracles, attributed to the Venerable Servant of God, are required. One miracle must have occurred after the candidate's death and one after (and if) the candidate is beatified. A detailed investigation of each miracle is conducted at the diocese level and is separate from the previous investigation regarding the candidate's holiness. The Church seeks unmistakable evidence of a divine sign from God, an event that defies logic, that a supernatural manifestation resulted from intercession by the candidate. Knowledgeable persons and eyewitnesses to the miracle are interviewed and testimonies documented. The resulting documentation is once again sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Many miracles involve healing of an incurable disease, that is, someone prays to the candidate for healing, the candidate intercedes and God cures the sickness. In such cases, medical experts are called to determine if there is any possible medical explanation for the cure. Given today's advanced medical technology, such cures can be closely scrutinized. The attending physicians are interviewed and third party physicians are asked to examine the cured person, if that person is still alive. The cure must be complete with no evidence the illness will reoccur.

Other miracles, those not involving a physical cure, are verified as much as possible through eyewitness testimony. Church scholars,

scientists, technical experts and theologians validate that the miracle was not the consequence of natural causes. Satisfied that something extraordinary happened because of the candidate's intercession, the Congregation provides details of the miracle to the Pope. He now possesses both evidence of a miracle and the results of the earlier investigation verifying heroic virtue. The Pope can recognize the person as *Blessed* and authorize veneration of the candidate within the local diocese or religious order where he or she lived. Martyrs, those who died defending the faith, can be beatified without evidence of a miracle. Verification of a second miracle, necessary for canonization, follows the same procedure as for beatification. After the second miracle is documented, the Pope can declare the person to be a saint. During the investigations, the Pope can deny sainthood or change his mind but once he issues a papal bull declaring the person to be a saint, the decision is infallible.

While the current process is extensive, involving years of work and hundreds of people, procedures used before 1983 were even more involved. Until the tenth century, however, there were no deliberate investigations and saints were made primarily by popular acclaim. Every community had 'their' saints, and in many instances people were selected based on popularity rather than holiness. The result was thousands and thousands of saints. It wasn't until 993 that a Pope declared someone to be a saint when Pope John XV canonized Bishop Udalricus of Augsburg, making him the first saint, other than a martyr, recognized universally throughout the Church.

The papacy began to exercise more and more control over the selection of saints and in 1588, Pope Sixtus V established a Vatican congregation known as the *Congregation for*