

# THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION

## BACKGROUND

The custom of canonization began in the early church by popular acclamation. Since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic Church has officially applied the standard of holiness of life to certain individuals who lived exemplary Christian lives and through a lengthy process of prayer and study have declared that the individual is in heaven.

The church does not 'create' saints, but simply applies the standard of gospel holiness to those God permits the church to know are in heaven with him. One principle way

for God to affirm the presence of an individual in heaven with him is through the performance of miracles through the intercession of that person.

In 1983, Pope John Paul II simplified many procedures called for in the canonization process, now handled by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The congregation is composed of a group of some 25 cardinals and bishops.

## PROCESS

1. To begin a cause it is necessary for at least five years to have passed since the death of the candidate. This is to allow greater balance and objectivity in evaluating the case and to let the emotions of the moment dissipate.
2. The process begins in the diocese where the candidate for sainthood lived or worked. A "petitioner" asks the bishop through the postulator for the opening of the investigation. The bishop forms a diocesan tribunal to investigate the candidate's life and writings for evidence of heroic virtue.
3. Once the diocesan investigation is finished, the acts and documentation are sent by the bishop to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints at the Vatican to evaluate the candidate's life.
4. When a person's case is accepted by the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, she/he is given the title "Venerable."
5. The next step is beatification. This allows a person to be honored by a particular group or a region. In order to beatify a candidate it must be shown that the person is responsible for a posthumous miracle. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation of medical experts and theologians. Once the decrees regarding the heroic virtues and the miracle are promulgated, the Holy Father decides on beatification, which is the concession of public worship, limited to a particular sphere. With beatification the candidate receives the title "Blessed."
6. The next step is canonization. For canonization another miracle is needed, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after beatification. The methods for ascertainment of the affirmed miracle are the same as those followed for beatification. Canonization is understood as the concession of public worship in the universal church. Pontifical infallibility is involved. With canonization, the Blessed acquires the title of "Saint."
7. Once a person is a saint, he or she is recommended to the entire Catholic Church for veneration.

Their name is added to the Proper of Saints calendar and they are invoked in public prayers. Churches can be dedicated to their memory, Mass can be offered in their honor, feast days celebrated in their memory, images of them may have a halo and their remains become holy relics which are publicly honored.