

# Process of Canonization

## Making of a Saint

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All souls in heaven are Saints. Formerly, the Catholic Church declared “Saints” as people who were outstanding in holiness either because they died as witnesses for the Faith (Martyrs) or they lived a life of heroic virtue (Confessors). The exact number of canonized Saints is unknown because not all recognized as Saints have been officially canonized. For the first half of the Catholic Church’s history, Saints were canonized in various ways. Today, the process of canonization is very complex and thorough. A record number of Saints have been canonized in the past 30 years, and about 2,000 candidates are being evaluated today.

### **SERVANT OF GOD:**

The official process of canonization, called a Cause, does not begin until five years after the death of the candidate. This period of time permits the Church to verify whether the candidate enjoys a true and widespread reputation of holiness and of intercessory prayer. When a Cause is officially begun, the candidate receives the title “Servant of God.”

The first stage of the process begins with the official opening of the Cause by the bishop of the diocese\* where the Servant of God died, and the appointment of a postulator, to assist in its promotion. The bishop nominates various officials for a tribunal to gather all the evidence for and against the canonization. Two theologians examine the Servant of God’s writings to make sure there is nothing in them contrary to the faith and moral teaching of the Church. Afterwards, they proceed to taking the testimony of witnesses who knew the candidate well.

### **VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD:**

The second step toward canonization starts when all the evidence is studied by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. If the evidence reveals true holiness exercised by the Servant of God, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation informs the Pope that the Servant of God either was a true Martyr or has lived a life of extraordinary and heroic virtue. The Pope orders the Congregation to issue the decree either of Martyrdom or of Heroic Virtue, and the Servant of God is given the title “Venerable.” This means that the Servant of God either died as a true Martyr for Christ or led a life of heroic virtue and, is worthy of imitation by the faithful.

## **BLESSED:**

When the Servant of God has been declared a Martyr he or she may be beatified, that is, declared "Blessed." If, on the other hand, the Servant of God has been declared to have lived a life of heroic virtue, it must be proven that one miracle has been granted by God through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God. Then, he or she is declared "Blessed."

For a healing to be considered a true miracle, a tribunal to gather all the evidence is established in the diocese where the event took place. It must be determined that there is no scientific explanation for the cure and that the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God is proven. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints conducts its study and judgment of the cure by the testimony of medical experts that no scientific reason can explain the recovery, and of theological consultants to verify that the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God was requested. Once again, the conclusions are presented to the Pope, who alone can declare that the event is a true miracle. Then, the Venerable Servant of God may be beatified. When someone is declared "Blessed," public ecclesiastical veneration is permitted by the Pope, but only in the diocese or country, or religious community to which the Blessed belonged. Churches may be dedicated to the Blessed, but only with the permission of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship.

## **SAINT:**

To be canonized, all of those beatified — both Martyrs and Confessors — one miracle is required. It must be proven that this event took place through the intercession of the Blessed and after the date of his or her Beatification.

When this has been proven, the Pope proceeds to the ceremony of Canonization, which is an act of the infallible teaching authority of the Pope. By this act, the Church declares that he or she is a Saint in heaven with God. It also means that the Saint is worthy of public veneration by the universal Church, and held up as a model for imitation and a powerful intercessor for all. Catholics do not "worship" the Saints, but rather venerate them. United in the Communion of Saints the faithful on earth ask the faithful in heaven, who are their brothers and sisters in Christ, to join them in presenting their needs humbly and prayerfully to God.

\*Father Rother's cause was given permission to be moved to his home diocese, the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.