

RCIA, Session #16: The Canonization Process

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VATICAN CITY, SEP 12, 1997 (VIS) - Today the Holy See Press Office made public the following note on canonical procedure for causes of beatification and canonization:

"1. Canon norms regarding the procedure to be followed for causes of saints are contained in the Apostolic Constitution 'Divinus Perfectionis Magister,' promulgated by John Paul II on January 25, 1983.

"2. To begin a cause it is necessary for at least 5 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.

"3. The bishop of the diocese in which the person whose beatification is being requested died is responsible for beginning the investigation. The promoter group ('Actor Causae'): diocese, parish, religious congregation, association, asks the bishop through the postulator for the opening of the investigation. The bishop, once the 'nulla osta' of the Holy See is obtained, forms a diocesan tribunal for this purpose. Witnesses are called before the tribunal to recount concrete facts on the exercise of Christian virtues considered heroic, that is, the theological virtues: faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, and others specific to his state in life. In addition, all documents regarding the candidate must be gathered. At this point he is entitled to the title of Servant of God.

“4. Once the diocesan investigation is finished, the acts and documentation are passed on to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The public copy used for further work is put together here. The postulator, resident in Rome, follows the preparation of the ‘Positio’, or summary of the documentation that proves the heroic exercise of virtue, under the direction of a relator of the Congregation. The ‘Positio’ undergoes an examination (theological) by nine theologians who give their vote. If the majority of the theologians are in favour, the cause is passed on for examination by cardinals and bishops who are members of the congregation. They hold meetings twice a month. If their judgment is favourable, the prefect of the congregation presents the results of the entire course of the cause to the Holy Father, who gives his approval and authorizes the congregation to draft the relative decree. The public reading and promulgation of the decree follows.

“5. For the beatification of a confessor a miracle attributed to the Servant of God, verified after his death, is necessary. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation, following a procedure analogous to that for heroic virtues. This one too is concluded with the relative decree. Once the two decrees are promulgated (regarding the heroic virtues and the miracle) 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 of Blessed.

“6. For canonization another miracle is needed, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after his 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.”