

## **Question: What is the process for the canonization of saints?**

**Answer:** Veneration of saints is not a new phenomenon in the Catholic Church. In fact, the church has officially recognized and venerated saints since the second century. Though the tradition of praying to and honoring those who have lived their lives in a special way for God has primarily been a tradition rooted in the Catholic Church, we can historically find the practice prefiguring Christianity altogether and being closely tied to Judaism. Making sainthood a part of our Catholic beliefs began in local communities. Oftentimes these communities would honor holy peoples they knew that had great influence on the spiritual life of their community. Men and women honoring the deceased holy person often directed their reverence toward the place where the saint was buried. In early Catholic tradition there was no specific criterion in determining who was and was not a saint. Instead, it was strongly held by early believers that those who were martyred and shed their blood for Christ were most certainly in Heaven. Because of these men and women's unique actions on earth and their special relationship with God, it was commonly believed though they were dead they could still exercise intercessory prayers on behalf of those that invoked their names. (Oxford Dictionary of Saints)

The current process for canonization has changed significantly through the centuries and now has very specific criterion to determine if one is to be raised to the status of saint by the church. To be canonized as saint in the modern Church, the person being considered must be marked with a life of piety and heroic virtue. (New Advent) The church does extensive study and investigation into the life of the person in regards to the individual's sanctity. The process begins with what is known as a cause. Before one can begin a cause, the person being considered for beatification must be deceased at least five years. To initiate the cause, the bishop of the diocese in which the potential saint died must begin investigation. Once the bishop has begun his formal investigation, he must form by order of the Holy See a diocesan tribunal. (New Advent) The job of the tribunal is to call witnesses before themselves to recount the facts surrounding the holy person's life. This includes the person's Christian virtues considered heroic, specifically in regards to faith, hope, and charity, as well as, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. (Catholic Apologetics) Once this information is gathered and the person is approved they are given the title "Servant of God" and all information regarding the person being investigated is sent to Rome to the Congregation of Rites. All of the information sent to Rome is then translated into Italian, where the writings of the Servant of God are reviewed by the cardinal relator and nine theologians that have been appointed by him. The theologian's investigation into the Servant of God includes their writings and life actions. A vote is taken by the theologians, and if the majority of them are in favor of the individual, the cause is continued on for examination by the cardinals and bishops whom are a part of the congregation. If their judgment is favorable as well, the prefect of the congregation presents all the results thus far to the Pope who then gives authorization to the congregation to draft a decree. (Catholic Apologetics)

For beatification to take place, the Servant of God must have performed a miracle of some sort during their lifetime. This miracle must be proven through canonical investigation that follows the same processes as the heroic virtues listed above. If a miracle is proven through the investigation then the Pope determines whether or not the person is to be beatified. If the Pope in fact approves, the person is beatified which means he can be publicly honored in a limited sphere. For a person to finally be canonized as a saint, another miracle must be attributed and confirmed to have taken place as a result of the person. If this is done, canonization is complete and public veneration of the individual is authorized by the Universal Church. (Catholic Apologetics)