

# Who Are The Saints? RCIA OCT 2, 2018

## **Who are the saints?**

When human beings die **and** go to heaven, they are then called saints.

## **Canonized saints**

The term saint must be distinguished from its use in the New Testament, where it more broadly refers to those who were members of the earliest Christian communities. The term canonization comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning a standard or measuring rod. The Church applies the standard of holiness laid down in the Gospels to those who have lived exemplary lives and, if they measure up, are declared saints, meaning that the Church believes they are in Heaven and, therefore, are worthy of veneration and imitation. Canonization is the process by which the Church makes the determination that they faithfully cooperated with God's grace and lived lives of heroic virtue. For some individuals, this might have meant leaving behind a life of sin through an experience of deep conversion that then showed itself in exceptional holiness. For others, accepting death rather than deny Christ might be the most significant indicator of heroic virtue and faith.

## **Are Saints alive/awake? Mark 12:26**

Christ himself said: "...have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

## **Three parts of the Church**

**The Church Militant** is the faithful on earth who continue to run "the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). We are in the midst of a battle: "For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war" (2 Cor 10:3). This battle for the souls of the faithful is raging constantly: "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the Heavenly places" (Eph 6:12).

**The Church Suffering:** Those who have died in friendship with God and are in Purgatory for final purification before they can see God.

**The Church Triumphant** is the saints, both those known to us and those known to God alone, in the glory of God in Heaven. The Church on earth shares a real though invisible communion with the souls in Purgatory and the saints in Heaven, and expressions of faith in this communion have marked the prayers of the Church since its beginning.

## **Communion of Saints**

“In the communion of saints, 'a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.' In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin" (CCC 1475). In the Nicene Creed, we profess belief in the communion of saints. Community connotes interaction. In heaven, the blessed are in communion around the Godhead in constant adoration, love, and praise. When Catholics pray to a saint, they are not replacing the one Intercessor with the blessed, but rather are praying to the one Intercessor through the blessed. Again, love is not limiting but ever-expanding. It is the love that Jesus has for humanity that allows prayers to come to Him through the blessed.

## **Is it wrong for Catholics to pray to saints?**

We pray with saints, not to them. Have you ever asked anyone to pray for you when you were having a hard time? Why did you choose to ask that person? You may have chosen someone you could trust, or someone who understood your problem, or someone who was close to God. Those are all reasons we ask saints to pray for us in times of trouble.

At Mass, or when someone asks us to pray for them, we offer a prayer or do a good work for their intention? If we can do this, why can't the saints in heaven do the same for us? Their intercessions in no way reduce the power of God, but ever increase it. Church militant (the faithful on earth) and Church triumphant (the blessed in heaven) are united along with Church suffering (the holy souls in purgatory waiting to enter eternal life). At death, life is changed rather than ended, so there is a wonderful community in the afterlife. The unity of all three churches is most superbly expressed at Mass, when all are united at the altar of praise.

## **How can ordinary people become saints?**

A common definition of a saint is an ordinary person who does ordinary things in an extraordinary way. It is the last criterion that determines holiness. By the sacrament of baptism everyone is called to be holy and a saint. How we cooperate with God's graces and practice the virtues is up to us. We are given this life to prove our love for God. We have been created to know, love, and serve God, and to prepare ourselves in this life to be with Him for all eternity. God helps us in many ways to become holy. First, He sent His only Son to show us the way. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Any person serious about becoming holy needs to allow Jesus to be in the driver's seat; his or her will must be united with God's will. The Lord gave us the Church to be a beacon of holiness. The Church is holy not because of its members, though there are many saints who belong to the Church, but because of Jesus, the Founder. It is holy because Jesus endowed His Church with special gifts—eternal truths contained in sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments which confer grace—making the Church the vehicle of salvation.

Staying close to the teaching magisterium of the Church, attending the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and receiving the sacrament of penance when needed, are all spiritual tools to aid a

person in becoming holy. In addition, there are many role models to aid the person in holiness. The lives of the saints are a fertile ground of holiness; they give examples of how to become perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. In addition, the communion of saints prays for us here on earth. The saints bring our prayers to Jesus and want us to share in the same joy that they have in paradise.

### **Am I called to be a saint?**

The Church recognizes that all Christians are called to be saints. Being a saint is not an extraordinary grace that is reserved for only a few — it is the goal of the Christian life for everyone. Christ left to the Church all the means necessary to fulfill his command, “You, therefore, must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). It is not a pipe dream of the Lord but a reality if we choose to cooperate with all that he has left us.

### **Exactly how many saints are there?**

There are over 10,000 named saints and beati from history, the Roman Martyrology and Orthodox sources, but no definitive "head count".

### **What is consecration to a saint?**

When a Catholic makes an act of consecration to a saint, it is not preempting love of God. Catholics, like any other Christian, only worship God. They honor and respect the saints as perfect examples of living a Christian life. When someone loves other people there is no competition. A child can love both mother and father. Love is limitless. Only hatred is confining.

### **What is a patron saint?**

Patron saints are chosen as special protectors or guardians over areas of life. These areas can include occupations, illnesses, churches, countries, causes -- anything that is important to us. The earliest records show that people and churches were named after apostles and martyrs as early as the fourth century. Recently, the popes have named patron saints but patrons can be chosen by other individuals or groups as well. Patron saints are often chosen today because an interest, talent, or event in their lives overlaps with the special area. For example, Francis of Assisi loved nature and so he is patron of ecologists. Francis de Sales was a writer and so he is patron of journalists and writers. Clare of Assisi was named patron of television because one Christmas when she was too ill to leave her bed she saw and heard Christmas Mass -- even though it was taking place miles away. Angels can also be named as patron saints. A patron saint can help us when we follow the example of that saint's life and when we ask for that saint's intercessory prayers to God.

### **What determines whether someone is named a saint?**

It is important to note that there are many more blessed in heaven than the Church has officially “canonized,” or recognized as saints. The solemnity of all saints is the Church’s way of saying there are countless faithful in Heaven. On November 1 we celebrate this glorious feast. Anyone who has died in the state of grace (which means as a friend of God) and has been admitted either directly or indirectly (via purgatory) into heaven is a saint. We all know great

and holy people in our lives—whether family members, colleagues, neighbors, or church members—who lived exemplary lives. They may not have been formally declared by the church to be saints, but this in no way negates the fact that they are enjoying the bliss of eternal life in heaven.

The official process of determining who is canonized (named a saint) is long and tedious, since the Church must be extremely scrupulous when investigating a candidate for sainthood. The process begins on the local level, where the holy person lived, and it doesn't start until five years after death—though this requirement can be dispensed. It could be introduced to the bishop of the diocese by the pastor of the parish, the people the holy person lived with or, if a member of a religious community like the Dominicans, by the superior. At this local level, if the bishop accepts the known facts of the candidate's holiness, then he or she is declared "venerable" and a formal process of examining the life of this person commences. In many instances, the process stays at this level. Much time, energy, and even money is needed to carry out a lengthy investigation.

Once proof of holiness has been established, a miracle must be attributed to the holy person's intercession to God. This miracle has to be authenticated by doctors, theologians, and, at times, scientists. If it is beyond a doubt that it is a miracle, the next stage is beatification. During this process, as in the previous, the holy person's writings and the people he or she was in contact with are interviewed. Beatification takes place through the pope or at the local level through a bishop. The holy person is called "blessed," can have a statue erected, and a feast can be placed on the liturgical calendar. Yet it is not an infallible statement as further investigation is required. Another miracle of intercession is needed. Scientific research into the miracle has to be performed. Upon a positive conclusion, the pope can canonize the person to be a saint for all times. An exception to this lengthy process is a martyr, one who witnesses to the faith and dies for Christ. Since martyrdom is so rare and such a total sign of one's fidelity to God, lengthy investigations and verifying miracles are not required for canonization. The only requirement is that the martyr is specifically killed because of his Catholic Christian faith and not for any other reason (political, racial, ethnic, etc.). Unlike terrorists, who pervert the concept of martyrdom, Christianity does not consider those who kill innocent victims to be true martyrs. Martyrs must be victims, not perpetrators, and the reason for their death must be their refusal to deny their religion.

### **Solemnity of All Saints November 1**

Aware that there are many more saints in Heaven than those who have been canonized, the Church sets aside this holy day, November 1, as the Feast of All Saints. Unlike most of the feast days for saints which are memorials, this day is a solemnity which is the highest level of celebration and, therefore, also a holy day of obligation for all Catholics. On this day we remember all the saints of Heaven, both canonized and uncanonized. All Saints Day (November 1) is better known by the secular world as the day after Halloween; the word Halloween actually means "All Hallows' Eve." Hallows is an old English word for Saints.

We present these things to shepherd you to the author of unmitigated mercy, the flawless advocate of the insignificant, whose death on the cross brings eternal consequence to the word Savior, Jesus The Christ. Amen