

## Venerable Servant of God / How the Process works

### **Supreme Pontiff: Decree of the Heroic Virtues of the Servant of God**

Once the person's Heroic Virtues have been recognized by the Pope, they are called Venerable, e.g. Venerable Servant of God Louis Martin, or Venerable Louis Martin.

### **Diocese: First Miracle Proposed in Support of the Cause**

The remaining step before beatification is the approval of a miracle, evidence of the intercessory power of the Venerable Servant of God and thus of his or her union after death with God. Those who propose a miracle do so in the diocese where it occurred, not in the diocese of the Cause, unless the same. The diocese of the miracle then conducts its own tribunals, scientific and theological.

The scientific commission must determine by accepted scientific criteria that there is no natural explanation for the alleged miracle. While miracles could be of any type, those almost exclusively proposed for Causes are medical. These must be well-documented, both as regards the disease and the treatment, and as regard the healing and its persistence.

While the scientific commission rules that the cure is without natural explanation, the theological commission must rule whether the cure was a miracle in the strict sense, that is, by its nature can only be attributed to God. To avoid any question of remission due to unknown natural causation, or even unrecognized therapeutic causation, theologians prefer cures of diseases judged beyond hope by medicine, and which occur more or least instantaneously. The disappearance of a malignancy from one moment to another, or the instantaneous regeneration of diseased, even destroyed, tissue excludes natural processes, all of which take time. Such cases also exclude the operation of the angelic nature. While the enemy could provoke a disease by his oppression and simulate a cure by withdrawing his action, the cure could not be instantaneous, even one day to the next. Much less can he regenerate tissue from nothing. These are, therefore, the preferred kinds of cases since they unequivocally point to a supernatural cause.

The theological commission must also determine whether the miracle resulted through the intercession of the Servant of God alone. If the family and friends have been praying without cease to the Servant of God exclusively, then the case is demonstrated. However, if they have been praying to the Servant of God, to the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and others, then the case is clouded, and probably cannot be demonstrated. Thus, the task of the theological commission is two-fold, judge whether the cure was a miracle, and judge whether this miracle is due to the intercession of the Servant of God. The decision is forwarded to the Congregation in Rome.

### **Congregation: First Miracle Proposed in Support of the Cause**

As occurred at the diocesan level, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints establishes both scientific and theological commissions. The affirmative vote of the theological commission is transmitted to the General Meeting of the cardinal and episcopal members, whose affirmative judgment is forwarded to the Supreme Pontiff.

It should be noted that in cases of martyrdom the miracle required for beatification can be waived - martyrdom being understood as a miracle of grace. In this case, the vote of the Congregation would establish the death of the Servant of God as true martyrdom, resulting in a Decree of Martyrdom by the Holy Father.

### **Supreme Pontiff: Decree of a Miracle**

With the Holy Father's approval of a Decree of a Miracle, the Servant of God can be beatified.

### **Blessed**

#### **Supreme Pontiff: Beatification**

With the beatification rite, conducted on the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, the Venerable Servant of God is declared Blessed, e.g. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. This title enables the person to receive liturgical veneration (Mass, Divine Office, images in churches etc.) at the local level, usually restricted to those dioceses or religious institutes closely associated with the person's life. Other dioceses and institutes may petition the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for the Indult to render *cultus* (veneration) to the Blessed. Without such Indult public veneration is illicit. The reason for this is that beatification is not considered an infallible papal act, and so it is not yet appropriate that the entire Church give liturgical veneration to the Blessed. Private devotion is, of course, permitted. Perhaps to reinforce this distinction, Pope Benedict XVI has restored the practice, in use prior to Pope Paul VI, of having the Prefect of the Congregation conduct the beatification, rather than the Pope doing it himself.

### **Diocese: Second Miracle Proposed in Support of the Cause**

After beatification the Church looks for a second miracle before proceeding to canonization. The process is the same as it was for the miracle which made beatification possible. The alleged miracle is studied by scientific and theological commissions in the diocese in which it is alleged to have occurred.

### **Congregation: Second Miracle Proposed in Support of the Cause**

After the diocesan process is concluded the proposed miracle is studied by a scientific and then a theological commission of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. The vote of this commission is forwarded to the episcopal members of the Congregation whose affirmative vote is communicated to the Holy Father.

### **Supreme Pontiff: Decree of a Miracle**

The consent of the Holy Father to the decision of the Congregation results in a Decree of a Miracle. Canonization is now possible.

### **Saint**

#### **Supreme Pontiff: Canonization**

By the Rite of Canonization the Supreme Pontiff, by an act which is protected from error by the Holy Spirit, elevates a person to the universal veneration of the Church. By canonization the Pope does not make the person a saint. Rather, he declares that the person is with God and is an example of following Christ worthy of imitation by the faithful. A Mass, Divine Office and other acts of veneration, may now be offered throughout the universal Church.

If the saint has some universal appeal he may be added to the general calendar of the Church as a Memorial or Optional Memorial. If the appeal is localized to a region of the world, a particular nation, or a particular religious institute, the saint may be added to the particular calendars of those nations or institutes, or celebrated by the clergy and faithful with a devotion to the saint with a votive Mass or Office.