Canonization of Saints

The History of Veneration:

Opportunity to honor important family members: Family Album

The veneration of saints has been a common practice in the Christian religion, since the early church – early Christians had meals or “feasts” in the Roman catacombs near the tombs of early martyrs.

Only gradually that the identification of who is a saint came to be regulated by bishops and pope.

Beginning in the 10th century, the Church asserted that no one could be venerated as a saint without its approval. The point was to ensure that unsuspecting faithful were not duped and subject to losing their faith

The first recorded canonization of a saint is Ulrich of Augsburg by Pope John XV in 993.

The process of canonization became a part of canon law in the Roman Catholic Church and developed into a long and complex process.

The process was simplified in 1983 under Pope John Paul II

The Significance of Canonization

The primary purpose of canonization is to officially authorize veneration and intercession of a particular saint. The investigation process that preceeds canonization seeks primarily to ensure that the person is in heaven and God is working through him or her.

Again – to protect the faithful and to promote love between the Church Victorious and the Church Militant (we are still fighting the good fight.)

Being canonized as a saint means that:

1. The saint's name is added to the catalogue of saints (meaning that veneration is authorized)
2. The saint is invoked in public prayers
3. Churches may be dedicated in the saint's memory
4. The Mass can be offered in the saint's honor
5. Feast days are celebrated in the saint's memory
6. Images of the saint are made in which his or her head is surrounded by a halo
7. The saint's relics (remains) are enclosed in vessels and publicly honored.

Importance of Miracles: Evidence of God’s favor

Martyrs: If a person is martyred for the faith, miracles are not necessary to be declared a saint. As mentioned above, the purpose of canonization is to verify that the person is now in heaven, and all those who die as martyrs are believed to go straight to heaven.

Non-Martyrs: For those who died naturally, however, at least one miracle is necessary to be declared Blessed (beatified) and at least two miracles are necessary to be declared a saint (canonized). These miracles must have occurred after the person's death (to demonstrate that the person is in heaven and able to assist the living), but miracles during his or her lifetime are also taken into account as evidence of God's favor.

When considering a reported miracle, the Church often consults with medical, scientific and theological experts to see if there might be alternative explanations. If the experts can find no explanation, they report that to the Church (they do not declare the event to be a miracle, just that they could find no natural explanation).

Phenomena investigated as miracles after a would-be saint's death include the following:

* Healings attributed to intercession of the saint or contact with relics.
* Incorruptibility – the saint's body does not decay after a long period in the grave. Example: St. Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) still has not decayed.
* Liquefaction – the dried blood of the saint liquefies every year on the day of his or her death. Example: St. Januarius (c.275-305), patron saint of Naples, September 19.
* Odor of sanctity – body exudes a sweet aroma instead of the normal stench of decay. Example: St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82) – sweet odor from her grave for nine months after her death.

Miracles during the life of the saint that have been reported:

* Levitation – the saint floats in the air. St. Joseph of Cupertino (1603-63) often levitated during prayer.
* Stigmata – the saint's body exhibits five wounds of Christ, which usually bleed during Mass. St. Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio are examples.
* Bilocation – the saint reportedly appeared in two places at once. Padre Pio (1887-1968) is an example.

The Process of Canonization

1. Usually between 5 and 50 years after a would-be saint's death, a formal request made to consider person as saint. The group making the request, called the Actor Causae, consists of people from the candidate's church and community, and the request is directed to the bishop of the diocese where the person died. The request includes testimony of the person's exceptional virtue and dedication to God.
2. The bishop decides whether the evidence is compelling enough to take it to Rome. If so, he asks the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for permission to open the cause.
3. If permission is granted, the bishop opens a tribunal and calls witnesses to attest to the quality of the person's public life. The person must be shown to have been virtuous, devout, religious, and characterized by love, kindness, prudence and other virtues (concrete examples are required). Miracles are not necessary at this point, but they are recorded if mentioned. If the person passes this step, he or she is called a Servant of God.
4. The bishop sends a report to Rome, where it is translated into Italian. This step is called the Apostolic Process.
5. A summary called the Positio is presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.
6. Nine theologians scrutinize the evidence and documentation. If majority pass it, goes to Congregation.
7. If they approve, the Prefect of the Congregation authorizes person to be called Venerable.
8. If any miracles are reported (which qualify the person for beatification or canonization), the Prefect presents the cause to the pope to decide. Canonization is considered a function of papal infallibility, as it is important that believers venerate and pray to only those who are actually in heaven.
9. The pope declares beatification or canonization at a special Mass in the saint's honor.

Ceremony of Canonization

The formal declaration of beatification or canonization occurs during a special Mass conducted by the pope. It usually takes place outdoors in St. Peter's Square before large crowds, but sometimes is conducted in the saint's home country. In 2001, over a half million people attended the canonization of Padre Pio (1887-1968). Four months later, Josemaria Escriva was canonized before 300,000 faithful.

The canonization ceremony is conducted as follows:

1. The saint's life history is read aloud.
2. The pope chants the following in Latin: In honor of the Blessed Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith and the growth of Christian life, with the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul and Our Own, after lengthy reflection, having assiduously invoked God's assistance and taken into account the opinion of many brothers of ours in the episcopate, we declare and define [name] to be a saint [or "to be blessed"], and we enroll him in the Catalogue of the saints, and we establish that in the whole Church he should be devoutly honored among the saints. In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
3. The person is officially recognized as blessed or as a saint at this point. A large tapestry with an image of the saint is unfurled before the faithful to admire and venerate.

Canonization of Bl. Junipero Serra, Sept. 23 at CUA

Born Michael Joseph Serra in 1713 in the Spanish coastal island of Mallorca

At 17, Serra joined a particularly severe branch of the Franciscans and took the name Junipero after St. Francis’ companion.

Junipero was quickly recognized by his community for his intellectual gifts and his profound spirituality. He earned his doctorate in philosophy and embarked on an academic career that culminated in his assuming the Duns Scotus chair of philosophy, named after one of the 3 great theologian/philosophers of the Middle Ages.

At age 36, Serra resolved to abandon his rather comfortable academic life and become a missionary to the New World, out of a sincere and deeply felt desire to save souls – the deepest calling of all Christians.

After a few years of doing administrative work in Mexico City, Junipero realized his dream of working with the native peoples of New Spain in Baja 9lower) California.

Roughly a decade later, the Spanish government was concerned about Russian encroachment into its territory of Alta (upper) California.

Serra was asked by his superiors to lead the missionary effort into what is now the State of California.

Junipero’s first intention was to evangelize the native peoples there, regardless of the political motives of Spain.

Over the next two decades, Serra was busy establishing missions from san Diego to north of San Francisco.

He died in 1784 and was buried at the San Calos Borromeo Mission in Carmel by the Sea near Monterrey.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries Serra was admired in Spain, Mexico and California.

The Church accepted his cause for canonization in 1985 and in 1986 declared him venerable. In 1988, Pope John Paul, II beatified Junipero Serra in St. Peter’s Square.

Having called Bl. Junipero “the Evangelist to the West earlier this year, Pope Francis will canonize him in a special mass at Catholic University

This will be the first canonization to take place in the United States.

Serra’s canonization is not without controversy.

Many critics of the Church and Serra see him as an imperial colonist who compelled native peoples to join the mission as slave laborers and be baptized against their will.

This modern reading of history appears contrary to most evidence.

Serra insisted again and again on protecting the rights of native peoples.

Spain had already made slavery illegal in its realm outside the Carribean.

While in Mexico City, Serra insisted on doing the manual chores of the Indian boys –sweeping halls and picking trash.

Early 19th century missionaries following Serra wrote homilies in multiple Indian languages as opposed to Spanish.

In fact one Cal. State archeologist, Reuben Mendozza who had been suspicious of Serra is an ardent defender. He noted that he heard school teachers telling children that the grillwork they saw at the mission was used by friars to torture Indians with fire. In reality the grillwork was a barbeque pit from the 1930’s.

Mendozza notes that unlike English slave plantations – entrance into the missions was a choice. Indians saw that life around the missions was better whereas elsewhere many were starving from drought in the Central Valley.

Perhaps most importantly, Junipero saw Our Lady of Guadalupe as guiding his missionary activity. Her statue is everywhere in the missions. Upon his arrival in Mexico City he spent his first night in her shrine.

Our Lady came to St. Juan Diego dressed in native garb – out of respect for the native peoples of New Spain. Evangelization is NOT about domination and exploitation – it is about bringing the Gospel to peoples and cultures you respect.

Did the Spanish government have the same motives as Bl. Junipero Serra in establishing the missions? No

But that is what the canonization of Bl. Junipero Serra can teach us.

He was not perfect and he did not conduct his evangelical work in a pristine environment devoid of political overtones.

He recognized that he was a sinner who had been saved by the love Christ and was guided by Our Lady to share that loving message with humble native people Alta California. He was willing to work through imperfect government enterprises to accomplish this work.

Bl. Junipero Serra demonstrates that we can work through the imperfect institutions to be a witness to Christ in a manner that is holy and virtuous.

Was he perfect? No.

Is he a saint, interceding for us to Christ, through His Blessed Mother? Absolutely.