



# Seasons of Holiness

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## *Early Christians and the Development of Saints*

A saint is a soul who is in God's presence. As one can imagine, no one really knows how many saints there are because many saints have lived humble and unassuming lives, serving God in all their thoughts and deeds.

The Church has recognized about 10,000 saints in its 2000-year history. These people have lived exemplary lives and are good role models for us. They show us how to live a good life by loving and trusting in God, and by helping others in need. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, we are all called to holiness (CCC #2013).

So how did the practice of recognizing saints begin? By the year 100 A.D., Christians were honoring other Christians who had died as martyrs, and they were asking for their intercession. These martyrs had given up their lives for the Faith in the persecution of Christians.

Moreover, because early Christians were Jews, this practice came from a long-standing tradition in the Jewish faith of honoring prophets and holy people with shrines. As a result, this was a practice done by the first Christians from the very beginning.

During early Christianity, saints were chosen by public acclaim. Though this was a democratic way to recognize saints, some saints' stories were distorted by legend.

Since the tenth century, the Church has used the process of canonization to name a saint. Gradually, the canonization process has evolved with time. Below you can learn more about this process.

Source: [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org)



## *The Canonization Process*

In 1983, Pope John Paul II made sweeping changes in the canonization process. The first step to this process begins after the death of a Catholic whom people regard as holy. Often, the process starts many years after the death of this individual in order to give perspective on the candidate. The local bishop investigates the candidate's life and writings for heroic virtue (or martyrdom) and orthodoxy of doctrine. Then a panel of theologians at the Vatican evaluates the candidate. After approval by the panel and cardinals of the *Congregation for the Causes of Saints*, the pope proclaims the candidate "venerable."

The next step is beatification. It requires evidence of one miracle (except in the case of martyrs). Since miracles are considered proof that the person is in heaven and can intercede for us, the miracle must take place after the candidate's death and as a result of a specific petition to the candidate. When the pope proclaims the candidate beatified or "blessed," the person can be venerated by a particular region or group of people with whom the person holds special importance.

Only after one more miracle will the pope canonize the saint (this includes martyrs as well).

It is important to keep in mind that canonization does not make a soul who is in heaven a saint; it only recognizes what God has already done.

Though canonization is infallible and irrevocable, it is a long process that takes a great deal of effort to secure. So while every person who is canonized is a saint, not every holy person has been canonized. More than likely you have known many "saints" in your life. The key factor to remember is that we are all called by God to also live holy lives.

# *Do Catholics Pray to Saints?*

We pray with saints, not to them.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you ask others to pray for you? Perhaps the people you asked were those whom you trust or whom you believed would understand your problem, or perhaps someone whom you saw close to God. Those are all the same reasons why we ask saints to pray for us in times of trouble.

**We pray with Saints, not to them.**

Since saints not only led holy lives, but are close to God in heaven, we feel that their prayers are particularly effective. Often we ask certain saints to pray for us if we feel they can relate to our problem. For example, many people ask Saint Monica to pray for them if they have trouble with unanswered prayers, because Monica prayed for twenty years for her son to be converted. Finally her prayers were answered in a way she never dreamed of -- her son, Augustine, became a canonized saint and a Doctor of the Church.



## *Is Keeping Pictures or Statues of Saints Idolatry?*

Catholics are often misunderstood in this area.

More than likely, if you open your wallet, look around your home, or office, you will find pictures of all your loved ones. Certainly these photographs are not symbols of idolatry, but rather, they serve as a reminder of people you love. Perhaps carrying these pictures make you feel that they are close to you when you're not together. Perhaps another reason is that it gives you the opportunity to share with others your photographs.

Those are some of the same reasons we have statues and pictures of saints. Seeing a statue of Saint Therese of Lisieux, who lost her mother from cancer when she was a child, might make us feel less alone when we are grieving. A picture of Saint Francis of Assisi might remind us of how much he loved God's creation and make us more aware of our environment and global warming issues.

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