

November ~ Exploring Sainthood

Steps To Sainthood

- † The process can begin after the candidate has been dead for at least five years.
- † The bishop of the diocese forms a tribunal to gather documents regarding the candidate and to hear evidence of the person's heroic virtues. At this stage, the candidate is entitled to be called *Servant of God*.
- † Results of the diocesan investigation are sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican in Rome.
- † At the Vatican, a panel of nine theologians reviews the candidate's life and works. If the majority is in favor, the documentation is passed on to the bishops and cardinals of the congregation.
- † If their judgment is favorable, the cause is passed on to the pope. At this stage, the candidate can be called "*Venerable*."
- † The next step is beatification. Yet another investigation, similar to the one used to confirm heroic virtues, is begun to determine whether the candidate authored a miracle. If a miracle is confirmed, the pope confers the title "*Blessed*." The candidate is worthy of public veneration at the local level. For example, Mother Teresa of Calcutta is now "Blessed Teresa of Calcutta"
- † For canonization, a second miracle must be proved. It must have occurred after beatification. Yet another investigation is opened. If the second miracle is confirmed, the candidate acquires the title "*Saint*," worthy of veneration by the entire church.

Veneration of Saints

The saints are those persons, baptized in Christ, who were faithful to the Gospel in their lives and now share eternal life with God. The Church recognizes their holiness of life and

deeds of charity as examples to all of us. The saints stand as models of Christian discipleship and intercede for us before the throne of God.

The early Church always held the memory of the saints in high honor. They remembered the heroic witness of the martyrs who gave their lives for Christ. Later they added to that list those, who without a martyr's death, gave exemplary witness of God's love and charity toward their neighbors. The first Christians visited the tombs of the saints, celebrated their feasts and sought their intercession.

This tradition continues today in the Church as we join in fellowship with the saints in praising God for our salvation in Christ.

Relics

Relics are the physical remains and effects of saints, which are considered worthy of our honor since they are representative of those persons now in glory with God. When we honor the relics of the saints, we praise God for his action in the life of the saint, venerate their memory and seek their intercession as we strive to imitate their virtue in loving God and neighbor. During the early Church St. Jerome made it clear where the emphasis belonged: Relics of martyrs should not be worshiped, but they should be venerated "in order the better to adore Him whose martyrs they are."

There are three classes of relics: *First-class* relics are parts of the bodies of saints and the instruments of Christ's passion. *Second-class* relics include items of clothing and objects used by a saint, and instruments of torture used on a martyr. *Third-class* relics are objects or cloths touched to either first- or second-class relics. Honoring saints through their relics should not be confused with superstitious beliefs.