



Info Sheet – Saints

What are Saints and why do we have them?

Saints are exemplars of Christian faith. They are people who have shown exceptional holiness and closeness to God, and followed Jesus, as a witness of the truth of the presence and work of God in history. The Holy Spirit guides the Church to identify people who follow the path of Christ and recognize them as Saints.

How many saints are there?

There are over 10,000 'official' saints. Pope John Paul II holds the record for the most canonisations in a single papacy: in the year 2000 alone he added 151 new Saints. In fact, the Catholic Church does not 'make' anyone a Saint; it simply recognises people who are already Saints. All Saints Day, 1st November, commemorates all those who are now saints, not just those the Church has set before our eyes but all those souls in heaven who are known only to God.

How do people become a Saint?

The church recognizes people as Saints not because of what they did but how close they were to God. This is portrayed in the selection process for Saints. As you will see there is a particular emphasis on closeness to God when proof is required, i.e. miracles and intercessions. The process, which cannot begin until after the candidate has died, is split into three main steps

- 1) Naming as 'Venerable'
People nominate a suitably 'holy' person after their death. The local Bishop investigates the candidate's life and teachings and sends a petition to the Holy See in Rome. The Vatican then evaluates the candidates. A postulator presents the positive aspects of the person's life, a 'devil's advocate' raises critical questions and other concerns from the person's life. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints then approves or declines the candidate. This person then carries the title 'venerable', which means she or he can be prayed to, but only by the individuals or groups associated with the person's cause.
- 2) Beatification
For someone to be recognized as an official Saint there must be evidence of one miracle that can be credited to the candidates. This means that an approved miracle must have taken place due to the intercession of this person. This person then carries the title blessed (beatus). For example, Padre Pio was said to have appeared to an eight year old boy and cured him of meningitis. The boy's father has been praying to Padre Pio for a miracle cure.
- 3) Canonisation
After Beatification another miracle is needed before the candidate can be canonised. This is to prove that the person is in heaven with God and therefore can intercede for us. After this has been approved the Pope gives the nominee the title 'Saint'.

Why do we choose a Saint's name for Confirmation?

As mentioned above, the church does not just think that Saints are good people but that they have a special closeness to God. This prompts them to do good deeds. It is good in life to have role models, people we look up to. So, this is why we choose a saint for a confirmation name, to guide us and encourage us to ask our Saint to pray for us to God.

How do Saints affect our prayer life?

We do not pray to the Saints, but we can ask them to intercede for us. Saints can have a profound effect on our prayer life. We may ask Saints to intercede for us as in the example of Padre Pio. We may also use Saints as role models for a style of prayer, for example Saint Therese of Lisieux. She was aware that she had many distractions in prayer but found, as in her everyday life, that it was the little things that made a difference. She gives us an example of being humble in prayer and aware of our own failings. Saint Vincent de Paul is a good example of how prayer leads to action. He said that we should 'leave God, for God', meaning that if we are praying and someone comes to our door in need we should leave our prayer time and help the individual, thus seeing God in everyone we meet.

What are Patron Saints?

Patron Saints are chosen as special protectors or guardians over certain areas of life. These areas can include occupations, illnesses, churches, countries, and causes - anything that is important to us. Patron Saints are often chosen 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 therefore he is patron of journalists and writers. Clare of Assisi was named patron of television (once it was invented) 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.

What are 'relics'?

Once a Saint has been recognised their body is now considered to have been 'Holy', and therefore any surviving remains are felt to retain an association with that holiness. Relics of Saints are respected in a similar way to holy icons. We have images and representations of saints to signify Christ who is glorified in them.

