

## Canonization

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Every year on Nov. 1, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates All Saints Day to honor individuals who displayed exceptional holiness — as can be argued for Day, Fathers Baker and Damien and Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha — or those who died as martyrs.

The pinnacle of the recognition for these individuals by the church is to be formally canonized, which literally means "to be officially put on the list."

According to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church," these canonized saints are revered as models for the faithful.

"By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace," article 828 reads, "the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors."

Father Henry Fehren, a former columnist for *U.S. Catholic* and one of Day's promoters, views her as an appropriate model for lay Catholics.

"Dorothy Day, to me, exemplifies the way lay Catholics should be today — to realize that they are the church and they need to take action," Father Fehren said in a phone interview from New York City. "She had a wonderful, solid piety based on Scripture and the liturgy. It wasn't some kind of mystical thing, excessively pietistic."

Day converted to Catholicism after having led a rather undisciplined early life. In addition to having a child out of wedlock and an abortion, she had a common-law marriage.

But she turned away from that life when she converted. In the process, she was deserted by her common-law husband and many of her early friends.

In 1932, she helped to co-found the Catholic Worker movement to help meet the needs of the unemployed, homeless and hungry. That movement spread across the country, including to Rochester in 1939, when St. Joseph's House of Hospitality was founded. Day,



Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

herself, dedicated her life to serving the poor, praying and writing.

She also angered political and church leaders when she was jailed repeatedly for taking part in protests. This fact, coupled with her early years, may help to explain why some of the more conservative elements in the church have resisted the start of her cause for sainthood, Father Fehren suggested.

Father Baker also sought ways to help the poor. The Buffalo priest, who also briefly served at St. Mary's Parish in Corning when Steuben County was part of the Buffalo diocese, helped create a home for infants, an orphanage, an in-

dustrial school, facilities for unwed mothers and a maternity hospital. He also built the Basilica of Our Lady of Victory in Lackawanna, and, before his death in 1936, fed hundreds of thousands of people during the Great Depression.

"To practice that kind of charity, you really have to be a tremendous believer in God," noted Monsignor Walter O. Kern, archivist for the Buffalo diocese as well as for Father Baker's cause.

Monsignor Kern began gathering material for Father Baker's canonization in 1982. Under current church rules governing the canonization process, the individual's diocese must conduct a thorough investigation of the person's life, religious practices, writings and activities, as well as any reports of miracles. One documented miracle — such as a cure that is beyond any natural explanation — is required for beatification; two miracles are required for canonization. The material is then sent to the Vatican.

On the local level, the bulk of the investigation

into Father Baker's cause has been completed. One batch of documents and materials related to the cause has already been sent to Rome, and a second and final collection will be sent later in October or early in November, Monsignor Kern said.

Several miracles have been attributed to Father Baker, Monsignor Kern reported. The most dramatic event involved a man who had cancer. Surgeons had begun to operate on the man only to discover that the cancer had spread. The doctors simply closed him up and sent him to a room to await his death, which they believed could come at any

moment. But, the monsignor said, Father Baker's cross was brought to the man, who "was out of the hospital in a few months. He lived long enough to bury two wives and marry a third."

Once all materials are in Rome, a postulator — a person assigned to argue on the candidate's behalf — will present the cause to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Knowing that causes can take years to be resolved, Monsignor Kern said he doubts he and those working for Father Baker's cause will live long enough to see Father Baker declared a saint.

"At this point," he said, "we would be happy to see in our life time, venerable."

Advocates of the cause of Father Damien had to wait until 1977 — 88 years after the Belgian-born missionary priest's death in 1889 — to see him deemed "venerable," that is, worthy of being venerated, and one of the steps toward beatification ("blessed") and ultimately canonization ("saint").

Father David P. Reid, SS.CC., pastor of St. Francis of Assisi/Ss. Peter and Paul Parish Cluster in Rochester, pointed out that the cause was not actively pursued until after Father Damien's body was brought back from Molokai to Belgium in 1936. The cause gradually gained momentum when people who had leprosy actively lobbied for him. One miracle — the 1895 cure of a French woman religious — qualified him for beatification, scheduled to take place May 29, 1995.

Like Day and Father Baker, Father Damien responded to people's needs. In his case, it was those people afflicted with Hansen's disease on Molokai.

"He saw what needed to be done in that situation, and went after it relentlessly," Father Reid said. In addition to fighting for better conditions for people, Father Damien demanded that they be treated as human beings. Before he even developed leprosy himself, he would say, "we lepers," when speaking.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha also suffered from an illness. Her face was scarred by childhood small pox. And like Day, she faced rejection because of her conversion. That rejection forced her to flee to a village where she would be among Christian Native Americans. She eventually moved to Canada, dying in 1680. Her cause was not launched until 1932. She was beatified in 1980, despite the fact that, even though there have been many miracles attributed to her, none have been documented.

According to Father Jim Plavcan, OFM Conv., of the Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine in Fonda, N.Y. — site of a village where she once lived — Pope John Paul II, in declaring her blessed, took into account the story that her pockmarked face changed into the smooth face of a child at her death, and "300 years of constant devotion."

"Before she died, people were just so impressed by her," Father Plavcan explained. "They said she was so outstanding in virtue."

Although there were no documented miracles attributed to her, Father Plavcan pointed out, the fact that she was a woman and a Native American likely helped her cause. He acknowledged that factors other than holiness can influence the speed with which a cause is resolved or the timing for that resolution.

"It sways thinking at times," Father Plavcan noted. "But we also see it as an act of God to sway thinking."

Father Fehren, for one, is hoping that God will sway the thinking about Dorothy Day so that she can perhaps join Fathers Baker and Damien and Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha in traveling down the path toward canonization.

"She fits right in with our age and our time with her concern for the hungry and homeless," he suggested. "People might find it easier to pray to her because she will be a saint of our time, and not of another time and a different culture."

## Diocesan saint

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tamaria, now 15, set out for the Passionist novitiate at Paliano. He would never see his home again. Although he loved his family dearly, he knew that God was calling him to perfect detachment.

The Passionist Fathers quickly saw promise in the new postulant. On March 5, 1899, they clothed him in the Passionist habit, and he took the religious name "Grimoaldo of the Purification" — Grimoaldo in honor of a saint of Pontecorvo; "of the Purification" in honor of the Blessed Virgin. During his year as a novice he demonstrated an extraordinary aptitude for the religious life. On March 5, 1899, he was allowed to take his religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, along with the special Passionist vow to preach on the passion of Christ.

After his profession, Confratello Grimoaldo was sent to the Passionist "Abbey" at Ceccano to begin his studies for the missionary priesthood. Both as a novice and seminarian he advanced rapidly in cultivating the Christian virtues. The Passionist rule was very strict, but since he had been leading a Passionist sort of life since age 8, he took to it at once. Like St. Therese of Lisieux, he was so devoted to doing small things perfectly that he outpaced his admiring colleagues in total commitment to God and neighbor. Despite his ready smile, however, it was no easy road he traveled toward spiritual maturity.

God gave him one major test before summoning him early to heaven. Though tall, strong and thus far in robust health, he could not fend off a sudden attack of acute meningitis. After patiently suffering its ravages for 18 days, and predicting the time of his death, he passed to his reward on Nov. 18, 1902. He was then only 19, but, as the Book of

Wisdom says, "Having become perfect in a short while, he reached the fullness of a long career" (4:13).

While still alive, Grimoaldo had promised to pray for the family in heaven. From the 1930s onward, others began to

ask his intercession. In 1951 the Italian Passionists suggested that his sister Vincenzina promote devotion to him in America. She did so with unselfish vigor. Soon many Rochesterians joined Jenny in praying at the little shrines she had set up in her home — first at 148 Baird St., then at 305 Waring Road. Before long she was able to report to the Passionists over a score of various favors granted.

Bishop Leonetti of Ferentino, Italy, launched the process of canonization on March 28, 1957. He asked for inquiries in Pontecorvo, in Brazil, and in Rochester. At his bidding, then-Rochester Bishop James E. Kearney named a special "rogatorial tribunal" to interview Jenny Panella and two other Rochester women from Pontecorvo. Chaired by then-Monsignor and later Bishop John E. McCafferty, the tribunal worked diligently from Oct.

10, 1957 to April 1, 1958. When Bishop Leonetti had received and collated all three reports, he forwarded them to the Vatican, where they proved very serviceable. On the basis of all the accumulated data, Pope John Paul II was able to proclaim, on May 14, 1991, that Grimoaldo had practiced the Christian virtues to a heroic degree, and deserved the title "Venerable."

Now only a proved miracle stood between him and beatification. That miracle (which will be covered in a later issue) was certified on July 4, 1994.

Thus Rochester and the world will soon venerate as "blessed" a teenager who proved that youths can still serve God with all their heart.

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Father McNamara, diocesan archivist, resides at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Irondequoit.

