

## COLUMNISTS

## Many 'new' saints cloaked in anonymity

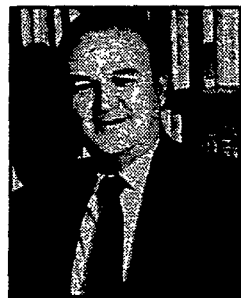
Pope John Paul II had canonized more saints (451, as of June) and beatified more holy individuals (just over 1,700) than all of his predecessors combined, going back to Clement VIII (1592-1605).

To be sure, John Paul II is the sixth longest reigning pope in history (almost 23 years), but four of the five popes above him on the list were in office after the formal procedures for canonization and beatification were in place. None of the four came close to the current pope's output, but neither did any of them canonize saints in such large clusters as John Paul II has.

His elevation of so many to the ranks of the *sancti* and the *beati* has evoked two different reactions. Many take great delight and even pride in the pope's initiative. To them, it demonstrates the high premium that he places on the call to holiness and on the spiritual dimension of the church's life and mission.

But others are concerned about a possible over-use of this papal prerogative. In making so many saints and in declaring so many others "blessed," John Paul II may be placing too much of a personal stamp on something of such great importance in the life of the church, namely, the role of saints as exemplars of holiness.

What type of Christian, after all,



## essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

serves as the most luminous model of holiness, and can one man, even someone so extraordinary as John Paul II, determine that?

Is the model of sanctity a cleric: pope, cardinal, bishop, priest? A religious? A founder of a religious order? A laywoman who lived a life of consecrated virginity? An ascetical figure dwelling in the desert or atop a pile of rocks, in the style of the so-called stylites?

Or is the model a martyr, executed for becoming a Christian in an anti-Christian country, or for trying to bring Christianity to such a place? A woman who accepts death rather than enter the married state? A seminarian who refuses to look upon women, even his own mother, and whose ascetical practices are so extreme that he becomes ill and dies

long before his time?

These are actual categories and profiles of individuals who have been raised to sainthood by the present pope and by various of his predecessors as well.

People are now asking, however, why there are not more saints drawn from the ranks of ordinary married lay women and men — individuals who did not join a religious community or found one after the death of a spouse. Why have so many of the canonized and the beatified never entered a committed, loving relationship with another human being, or raised a family, or held an ordinary job?

Of the 451 canonized by the current pope (as of June), 156 were clergy, 20 were non-ordained religious men, and 29 were religious women. That is almost half of the entire number.

While 164 laymen and 82 laywomen have been canonized in this pontificate, most of these were part of large groups of martyrs: 92 of the 103 Martyrs of Korea, 59 of the 117 Martyrs of Vietnam, and 83 of the 120 Martyrs of China.

But as many Catholics know, saints have significance as individuals, not as anonymous members of large groups. Individuals, not crowds, serve as models.

And yet 234 of the 246 lay people canonized by Pope John Paul II fall into this

collective category. They were a part of large groups of heroic Catholics martyred for their faith in Asia. For purposes of comparison, 134 of the 205 clergy and religious canonized in this pontificate are included among these groups.

When one adds these 134 clergy and religious Asian martyrs, fully 368 of the 451 individuals canonized by Pope John Paul II are cloaked in a kind of holy anonymity. Which ones will become patrons and patronesses of parish churches, dioceses, cities, countries or occupations? Which ones will provide names for the newly baptized? To which ones will Catholics pray in times of need?

Perhaps a deeper question is: Why have the great majority (at least 340 of 451) been martyrs, canonized collectively?

The history of the church discloses a rich diversity of truly great and memorable saints, most of whom did not die for the faith: the Blessed Mother, Francis of Assisi, Mary Magdalene, Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, Vincent de Paul, Catherine of Siena, and the list goes on and on.

This is not to set one group against another, but to remind us, as Vatican II did, that everyone is called to holiness.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## Lost souls need help returning to God

24th Sunday of the Year (Sept. 16): (R3) Luke 15:1-32; (R1) Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; (R2) 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

The busy bodies were criticizing Jesus again — this time for the kind of people he was associating with. Tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. This irked the Scribes and Pharisees. So Jesus told his critics three parables. One was about a shepherd who left 99 sheep to find one that had gone astray. Another was about a woman who swept her house to find a lost coin. And the third was about a prodigal son. Our Lord's point was that God seeks the lost and rejoices when a lost one is found and comes home.

The world is full of lost people — people who have lost their goal in life, their enthusiasm, their joy, their hope.

If there are so many lost souls, why are we doing so poor a job in leading them to Christ? One reason is that often we don't like lost people. They look different, they talk different, they get their life in a mess. They tend to be ruled by emotions rather than by good sense or faith. They're not our kind of people. So we avoid them. We would rather focus on winning people who are like us. These people may have problems and ups and



## a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

downs. Yet we think of all kinds of reasons to focus on them, our kind of people. As a result the hundredth sheep wanders farther and farther from the fold. The lost coin lies lost. And the prodigal remains away, slowly losing self-esteem and hope.

There's another reason why we're not very good in finding the lost. For some reason the lost don't see our concern for them as real. So the lost avoid us. A cynic put it this way:

"I was hungry and you formed a humanitarian club and discussed my hunger. I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health. I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me. You seemed so holy, so close to God, but I'm still very hungry, sick and lonely." A

recovering alcoholic said that, after his life-changing experience in Alcoholics Anonymous, church people were unbearable.

After people have been a part of a real community where people loved enough to be honest, to sacrifice time and energy to help others in their struggle with alcohol, the superficiality of some "church-goers" repels them.

Too often people in the church focus all their energy on other people in the church. Rather they ought to think about and seek those outside the church. In the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, Jesus is telling us that our focus should be on seeking the lost. And when we find them, we are to rejoice and welcome them back as children loved by God.

A young man cashed his paycheck on Friday. At home, he realized that he hadn't counted the money when he left the bank. The teller must have shortchanged him. Would someone believe him?

On Monday, to his surprise, the teller had an extra \$100 in her drawer, and was hoping someone would claim it. He called his wife and said, "I have my lost money!" He was delighted like the people in our Lord's parables when they had

found what was lost.

So Jesus and heaven rejoice when the lost is found. These may be our friends or co-workers. They may have strayed and are ready to be found. When they are, all rejoice.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

## Daily Readings

Monday, September 17

1 Timothy 2:1-8; Psalms 28:2, 7-9; Luke 7:1-10

Tuesday, September 18

1 Timothy 3:1-13; Psalms 101:1-3, 5-6; Luke 7:11-17

Wednesday, September 19

1 Timothy 3:14-16; Psalms 111:1-6; Luke 7:31-35

Thursday, September 20

1 Timothy 4:12-16; Psalms 111:7-10; Luke 7:36-50

Friday, September 21

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13; Psalms 19:2-5; Matthew 9:9-13

Saturday, September 22

1 Timothy 6:13-16; Psalms 100:2-5; Luke 8:4-15

OBITUARY INFORMATION OF:  
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Michael D. Critelli and  
Carmela (Gigliotti) Critelli  
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