

Love Remains:  
A Short Catechesis on the Veneration of the Relics of Blesseds Louis and Zelig Martin  
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1. What is a “blessed” or a “saint?”

A “blessed” or a “saint” is a disciple of Jesus Christ who, after death, lives happily ever after in God's perfect presence. There are two meanings to these terms. There is the everyday meaning, and there is the technical meaning.

The everyday meaning of “saint” is a holy or pious person. The everyday meaning of “blessed” is essentially the same thing. A saint is someone who is obviously blessed by God.



The technical meaning of “blessed” or “saint” refers to an official recognition by the Church that a person's soul is now in heaven. As a result of this official recognition, the title “Blessed” or “Saint” may be added to a person's name, as, for example, “Blessed Teresa of Calcutta” and “Pope St. John Paul II.”

2. How does someone become a “blessed” or a “saint?”

To become a blessed or a saint is the task of every Catholic while on earth. Our mission in life is to get to heaven. Our goal in order to accomplish that mission is to seek, to know, and to love God in this life.

We might know someone who has died who, during his or her lifetime, accomplished this goal. That person was a faithful Catholic by everything that he or she believed, celebrated, lived, and prayed. However, this person might have only been known to his or her family and friends in the local area. Whether or not this person accomplished his or her mission is known only to God, but the Church gives us All Saints' Day to celebrate those countless saints who lack official recognition.

Official recognition of a person as “blessed” or “saint” is a long and thorough process. It is called the cause for canonization. It involves several phases:

- 1) Usually the person has to be dead for at least 5 years. Generally speaking, most officially recognized “blesseds” and “saints” have been dead for decades or centuries.
- 2) The second phase is called the “local or diocesan” phase. A person or an organization in the Church, called the petitioner, asks for the cause of canonization to begin. A different person, called the postulator, is in charge of leading the cause. After a detailed review of the person's life and artifacts, such as writings, the diocesan bishop may proclaim the person “Servant of God.”
- 3) The third phase takes place at the Vatican. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints reviews the material from the diocesan phase to determine if the person lived an heroically virtuous life. This Congregation works for the pope. If the Congregation of theologians, bishops, and

cardinals affirms the person's virtue, then the pope proclaims the person "Venerable."

- 4) The fourth phase is a continued review of the person's life with the answer to one of two questions: did this person die a martyr of the Christian faith or has a miracle been performed through this person's intercession since being proclaimed "venerable?" If the answer is, "Yes," to either question, then the pope proclaims the person "Blessed" in a formal ceremony called "beatification." As a result the person's intercession, image, and relics may be venerated by the local Church without permission and by the Universal Church with permission.
- 5) The fifth phase is a review of an alleged miracle since the beatification. Most miracles are scientifically inexplicable medical cures. When a miracle is affirmed, the pope proclaims the person "Saint" in a formal ceremony called "canonization." To be canonized means to be added formally to the official list of saints recognized by the Church. The official list numbers around 7000 and is called the Roman Martyrology.
- 6) A sixth phase is very rare. It is the proclamation by the pope that a particular saint is a "doctor of the Church." "Doctor" comes from the Latin word for "teacher." Only 35 doctors of the Church have been recognized for their teaching as especially beneficial for furthering the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Isn't contact between the living and the dead forbidden by the bible?

Certain contact between the living and the dead is forbidden by Divine Revelation while other contact between the living and the dead is meritorious. Forbidden contact with the dead is called divination. It is an alleged calling up of the dead by a medium in order to find out information about the future in order to control it. Meritorious contact with the dead is called veneration. It is the seeking of help from those who "die in the Lord," (Rev. 14:13).

4. What does the Apostles' Creed mean when it says, "I believe...in the communion of the saints?"

The communion of the saints is the communication between the three states of the Church just as there is communion among the three Divine Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. There is the Church in heaven now. There is the Church in purgatory; they are on their way to heaven but experience God's purifying mercy now in an exclusively spiritual way. There is the Church on earth, striving toward God's perfect holiness.

5. Why should we imitate the saints?

We should imitate the saints because they are the friends of God. The Lord Jesus calls his disciples friends. We are his friends when we love one another as Jesus loves us. The Apostles Peter and Paul tell the friends of Jesus to greet one another with a holy kiss. The saints imitate Jesus in their time and place. So, they are examples of how to imitate Jesus closer to our time and place.

6. What does it mean to venerate a saint's image?

Only God is worshiped and adored. Saints, with the Blessed Virgin Mary being the first among them, are honored. This honor is called veneration. Physically, to kiss or to touch an image or icon of a friend

of Jesus is to pass our honor spiritually through the icon on to the friend of Jesus in heaven. God's law forbids the worship of idols. It is idolatry to adore a humanly made image of the invisible God. Yet, it is an honor to venerate a humanly made image of Christ in his humanity or one of the saints because the respect shown to the image is the respect that one would show to Christ or one of his friends if that person was physically present to us.

7. What does it mean to venerate a saint's relic?

A relic is the physical remains of a person. A first class relic is a part of the person's body, such as bone or hair or blood. A second class relic touched the person's body, such as clothing or the weapons used to kill the martyr. A third class relic is any religious image or good touched to a first class relic so that the favor of God that is upon this friend of God may be extended to other disciples in the Church on earth.

8. Isn't the veneration of a saint's relics just superstition?

No, the veneration of a saint's relic is not superstition. Superstition is the belief that God acts in a magical way without conversion on the part of the disciple of Jesus Christ. The veneration of a saint's relic is an act of humility that makes one more receptive of the grace of conversion because one recognizes in oneself that the goal of this life has not yet been achieved. A saint's relic could be abused by superstition or in other ways, but this is not the intention of the Church when she encourages the veneration of relics.

9. Who are Blesseds Louis and Zélie Martin?

They are the parents of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the "Little Flower," (1873-1897), a doctor of the Church. Venerable Louis (1823-1894) and Zélie (1831-1877) Martin were beatified on Oct. 19, 2008, in Lisieux, France. They had a total of nine children. The five who survived into adulthood all became nuns. Evidently, they created a Catholic home that helped their children, not hindered them, to accomplish their goal in life. Now, prayers may be directed toward them, seeking their intercession. Their image and their relics may be venerated. Their feastday is their wedding date, July 12, and it may be celebrated in their local diocese and in other places after permission has been granted. They were co-patrons of the October 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family in the Context of Evangelization at the Vatican.

10. How can I become a saint?

By faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and by baptism in water, the Church has already claimed you to be a saint. You are filled with potential holiness. Yet, you need to actualize this claim. You can actualize this claim by cooperating with everyone else in the Church to believe, to celebrate, to live, and to pray as a normal Catholic. When we engage in these four practices, or pillars, we will evangelize, baptize, and catechize other disciples. When we have achieved these three objectives, then we will have accomplished our goal and attained our mission of eternal happiness with God and all of the other angels and saints in heaven.

May Blesseds Louis and Zélie Martin pray for us who are potential saints to become actual saints, and may our families especially be places of sowing and growing seeds for a new springtime of the Church.