

## The History of Catherine's Cause

The history of Catherine's cause started in **1909** (68 years after her death), when Sr Genevieve Burke, superior-general (for the time being) of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, (Ireland), launched a world-wide crusade of prayer among Sisters of Mercy for the promotion of Catherine's Cause. *(At that time sixty years had to elapse from the date of the death of the holy person before a Cause could be initiated. The time span for the initiation of a Cause was changed to 5 years in the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law).*

The political history of Ireland of the time is listed as the reason why the process did not move forward then. A request to restart the process was made in 1923 and again in 1937/38. Both these attempts failed to progress. Finally, in **1954** an historical commission was established in the diocese of Dublin. The brief of this commission was to gather and examine all documentary evidence on Catherine's life. (This documentary evidence included everything written by and about Catherine, together with newspaper reports, homilies at the time of her death, and anything written about her after that which would point to the fame for holiness that she continued to enjoy long after her death).

In **1973** the historical commission completed its work and Sr Angela Bolster (Southern Province Congregation) undertook the writing of the *Positio Super Virtutibus* which is a detailed compilation of the life, writings and fame for holiness of Catherine McAuley. What is presented in a position is considerably less than an autobiography. It is, rather, the chronology of a life set in an historical and social context to illuminate the importance of the life and charism of the Servant of God. In the process for canonisation, the charism with which the person is gifted is constantly emphasised.

The presentation to and examination of the position by the Congregation for Causes resulted in Catherine being declared Venerable on the **9<sup>th</sup> of April 1990** by Pope John Paul 11.

### Stages in the process for canonisation (Code of Canon Law 1983)

- A. Once the process for canonisation is initiated the person is called "**Servant of God**".
- B. Being declared **Venerable**, the second step on the road to canonisation, means that the Church formally recognises that the person has lived Christian values heroically, that is, in a way that goes beyond what is expected of the ordinary good living Christian person.
- C. **Beatification**, the third step on the road to canonisation, requires a miracle ratified by the Church. For the ratification of the miracle, the Church requires a happening that is inexplicable to science and in the case of a healing from illness, it must be instantaneous, complete, enduring and inexplicable to medical science of the day. The alleged miracle must also take place while prayer is being offered to God through the specific intercession of the Servant of God.

Once beatified, the Servant of God is venerated locally. The beatification ceremony is performed by the local ordinary or the Prefect for the Congregation for Causes. A martyr does not require a miracle for beatification, only for canonisation.

D. The final stage in the process is Canonisation for which a second miracle is required by canon law. At this stage the Servant of God is venerated universally in the Church. The canonisation ceremony is led by the Pope.

[Pope Francis has waived the necessity of a miracle for the canonisation of Blessed John XXIII. In this he is following in the footsteps of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who had already done the same for Hildegard of Bingen and Angela of Foligno.]

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April 2019