

The Saints

- The public veneration of saints in the Christian Church is known to have existed since the 2nd century.
- The earliest Christian saints were martyrs (witnesses) to important acts surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. Worship was focused on the saint's tomb.
- During the 4th century devotion to the martyrs spread rapidly and began to embrace virgins, monks and confessors (a title of honour to designate those brave champions of the Faith who had confessed Christ publicly in time of persecution and had been punished with imprisonment, torture, exile, or labour in the mines, remaining faithful in their confession until the end of their lives¹).



- Originally, it was popular acclaim that recognized a saint. Miracles were regarded as a proof of sanctity. Secondary relics such as handkerchiefs and girdles were regarded as instruments of divine healing power. The relics or bones of the saint were considered as both a source of healing and an agent which gave protection to the church which possessed them. Shrines of saints were well established in most parts of the Roman Empire.
- Little by little the decision to canonize (declares that a person who has died was a saint, upon which declaration the person is included in the canon, or list, of recognized saints) or not to canonize fell securely on the pope (highlighting the growing power of that office). By the 12th or 13th centuries the Vatican was the source of most new canonizations, and by Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644) the papacy had complete control.
- Saints usually have a "feast day" assigned to them. Feast Days, or Holy Days, are days which are celebrated in commemoration of saints, by special services and rest from work. A feast not only commemorates an event or person, but also serves to excite the spiritual life by reminding us of the event it commemorates.²



The Holy Right Hand. A hand-relic of the first Hungarian Christian king Saint Stephen I. (1000-1038)

¹ New Advent. www.newadvent.org. Accessed December 1, 2015.

² New Advent. www.newadvent.org. Accessed on December 1, 2015.

- The veneration (respect or awe inspired by the dignity, wisdom, dedication, or talent of a person³) came under widespread attack at the time of the Reformation. Abuses connected with them, including deception and fraud, were given much publicity by church reformers. Some Protestant churches (Anglican, Lutheran, etc.) have retained the veneration of the saints, while others have abandoned the practice.
- The Reformed Roman Catholic Church has dealt with canonization with far more precision and inquiry.
- Today, there are three grades in the elaborate process of canonization: the 'Venerable Servant of God', 'Blessed' and the 'saint.'
 - For beautification evidence is needed of heroic virtue; when this is formally recognized the candidate is beautified and local veneration may be paid to him.
 - Full, solemn canonization follows after some years, decades or even centuries after more stringent enquiries. With canonization goes the right to be formally called 'saint' and to receive universal veneration.

Example of a path to canonization:

1656 - Kateri Tekakwitha is born into a Mohawk community along the Mohawk River.

April 17, 1680 - Kateri Tekakwitha dies south of Montreal.

1684 - Pilgrims start arriving at her grave and her remains are sometimes used as relics for healing.

1884 - The process for Tekakwitha's canonization was initiated by United States Catholics.

January 3, 1943 - Pope Pius XII declared her venerable.

June 22, 1980 - Beatified as Catherine Tekakwitha by Pope John Paul II.

October 21, 2012 - Canonized by Pope Benedict XVI.



Farmer, David. *Dictionary of Saints*. London: Oxford University Press, 2003.

³ Merriam-Webster. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/veneration>. Accessed December 1, 2015.