

## Second Sunday of Easter

I was 10 years old when Pope John XXIII died, but I still remember how much people loved him and the dramatic changes he brought to the Church through the Second Vatican Council. As I studied for the priesthood and learned more about the liturgy of the Catholic Church, I came to admire this man and his accomplishments even more.

I was 25 years old and a deacon when Pope John Paul I died after just one month in office. Another seminarian knocked on my door to wake me up with news. He called out, "The pope died." I was still very sleepy, so I asked, "Who died?" He said, "The pope, the pope." I said, "That happened last month." He said, "No, the new one." The election of John Paul II brought great excitement, and we felt privileged to be alive for the first non-Italian pope in 450 years.

**Tomorrow/This morning** Pope Francis **will canonize/canonized** both men, adding them to the list of saints. Never before has any pope canonized two popes in the same ceremony.

The Catholic Church has a formal process to recognize individuals as saints. Five years after their death holy persons can become known as "servants of God," that is potential candidates for sainthood. After further research and prayers, they are named "blessed" if a miracle happens through their intercession. After a second miracle is documented, they may be declared saints. The ceremony making it official is called a canonization, and these celebrations take place more often than you may think. The Catholic Church recognizes in total about 10,000 saints. Many of them you've never heard of, but they were all holy people who made a difference in the lives of others.

Any one of us could identify people we know whom we regard as saints. They have influenced us to live a better life by their example and devotion. They just haven't receive the fame that others did.

Catholics believe in the communion of the saints. We believe that after people die, we can still communicate with them, and they can intercede for us. My mother had two brothers and a sister who lived into adulthood. She also had a brother and a sister who died in infancy. Whenever Mom needed to get a saint to intercede for her, she hated to bother saints who were already busy, like Mary, Anthony, Patrick, and Francis. Instead, she prayed to her infant brother and sister. She figured that they were both in heaven, nobody knew who they were, and they had plenty of time on their hands to listen to her prayers.

After Thomas the apostle placed his finger into the wounds of Christ, he said that he believed. But Jesus blessed those who believed without seeing. We cannot see the saints, but we believe that they are there as models for our lives, intercessors for our needs, and companions, God-willing, at the end of our days.