Saints Q&A
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1. What is a saint?

The word \textit{saint} comes from the Latin word \textit{Sanctus} which means “holy” or “set apart”. St. Paul first said it (Phil. 4:21) to mean all of the \textit{faithful} early Christians. Our Church teaches that the saints occupy a hallowed (holy, special) place in Heaven. That place is in the presence of the Beatific vision... basically, front row center in God’s throne room.

The Church doesn’t say that every saint is named... far from it – the ones we officially call “saints” are joined by countless others who lived “saintly” lives but whom we haven’t investigated and titled “saints”, officially. By best estimates, there are over 10,000 saints that are currently named... again, most saints are not officially named and included on the official Church calendar, but are most certainly in Heaven.

In fact, there are living, breathing saints around you right now... and not just in the \textit{Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta} types that you see on television. There are saints in your own parish and/or neighborhood, very likely. Most of them will never enjoy the official “saint” title while on earth, but that’s okay – truly saintly people would never want the title, anyway.
2. Why should saints matter to me today, in the 21st century?

Many times, Catholics (young and old) will question why the saints are important or how they are relevant in modern times. While technology and times change, life is a constant, as are temptation, sin, grace and holiness.

For starters, we can always learn from the saints. It is essential that we never lose our sense of discipleship (literally, “student-ship”). We must keep learning from our past, ours and our familys’. The saints are our older brothers and sisters in the faith. They are role models that can teach us, inspire us, and remind us that we, too, CAN (and should!) become a saint.

It’s not weird to respect saints, to talk about them, study them, honor them or invite them to pray with and for you. What is weird is claiming to be a Christian and not actually desiring holiness and intimacy with Christ to such an intense level that you would stop at nothing to live the life of a saint yourself.

Live the life of a saint today and every day hereafter and someday you’ll be one. You might even have a statue in your honor... not because you want it, but because your life deserves it.
3. How does someone get the official title of “Saint”?

The title of saint is conferred on someone after what is called the canonization process. When someone is formally canonized, the Church declares a person to be in Heaven and worthy of being included during the Eucharist prayer of the Mass.

The canonization process has been changed several times over the centuries. In the early Church, a person was declared a saint by vox populi (“the voice of the people”). Over time the bishops decided to create more of a formal process of canonization. Today, the usual process involves a ten-year period with three main steps.

**Step 1:** If you had someone you wanted to suggest for sainthood, you and a group would send a report to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (a Vatican group). That congregation would research the candidate’s life to see if the person should be recommended or not. If the Pope accepts the report from the congregation, the person in question is titled “Venerable” (Venerable means “accorded great respect due to heroic character”).

**Step #2:** Once a person is declared venerable there are several more steps in the process in which the person’s life is exhaustively researched and examined. During this time, witnesses (who knew the candidate) are contacted, people can come forward to raise objections, debates can ensue and discussions had. If a proven miracle (one that doctors or scientists cannot explain) occurs because of someone asking for the candidate’s prayers, the individual can be declared “Blessed”. This declaration usually takes place at the person’s beatification, a ceremony by the Pope that usually takes place at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

**Step #3:** The final step for formal canonization is proof of a second miracle. Once again, the Church conducts a thorough investigation to make sure the miracle is legitimate. If the miracle is determined to be genuine, the Pope may then declare the person an official “Saint” of the Catholic Church. The canonization ceremony almost always occurs at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.
4. Do Catholics worship saints and pray to them?

One of the most common misconceptions about the Catholic faith is that Catholics worship saints and pray to them. Many well-intentioned, God-loving Christians of various Protestant denominations have heard this falsehood from trusted but ignorant teachers over the years, or have read it in books that claim to “expose” what they believe to be the Catholic faith. Unfortunately, as with most misconceptions, these conclusions are drawn with little or no true understanding of the Catholic faith. As the famous Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, “There are less than 100 people in this world who actually hate Catholicism, but there are MILLIONS of people who hate what they mistakenly believe Catholicism to be.”

Just to make it very clear up front, both Catholics and Protestants believe and command that we are to only worship and pray to GOD. The Catholic Church does not and has not encouraged folks to take their attention or prayer off of or away from Jesus. The confusion on the part of most non-Catholics stems from a misinterpretation of what is truly happening when a Catholic asks the saints to pray to Christ on their behalf.

Catholics believe that saints are not dead, but fully ALIVE and in Heaven. Because they are in Heaven they are far “closer” to God than we (sinners) are. Just like our friends here on earth can pray for us, so too can our “friends in Heaven”.

Sometimes Catholics say that we pray to the saints, but that’s not actually right. It is more correct to say that Catholics pray with or through the saints, who in turn take our prayers and give them to Jesus. Just like when we sing the “Litany of Saints” or pray at the end of class, we ask the saints to pray for us.
5. Why do we have patron saints, and why do we have patrons for such “random” things?

While the patronages of certain saints do appear a little “random” on the surface, it’s actually quite cool. Here’s why:

Saints had hobbies and interests, just like you and me. St. Ignatius of Loyola played pool. St. Charles Borromeo loved to play chess. St. Jerome played the fiddle. St. Lidwina was an ice skater. And so on...

Now, how does someone become a “patron” saint? Well, take St. Lidwina, for instance. She was 16 years old when she had a freak accident while ice skating. What began as a broken rib led to gangrene (it was the 14th century) and eventually she was paralyzed. But she offered her paralysis and suffering to God (Redemptive suffering! Woot woot!), and continued to pray and meditate. Her devotion to the Holy Eucharist grew (even though she was confined to her bed) and over time she was given visions of Heaven and was visited by various saints. Tradition even holds that many miracles and healings were performed at her bedside. So, she is the patron saint for the disabled, the homebound, and ice skaters.

In addition, patrons are given to us for special situations (death, illness, divorce, etc.), special places (your hometown or native country), or special needs (hopeless causes, schoolwork, lost articles, etc.).

Nowadays there are patron saints for just about everything, and it’s a great thing. It’s almost guaranteed there is a saint who enjoyed the same things you do, which means that you may feel closer to certain patron saints more than others (which is perfectly fine!). A lot of times people pick their Confirmation saint based on what they have in common with particular saints.

Lists of Patron Saints
http://www.americancatholic.org/features/saints/patrons.aspx
http://www.catholic.org/saints/patron.php?letter=A
6. What are relics and what do they have to do with saints?

Relics are special things associated with saints. While there are literally millions of relics in the world, not all are “official relics”. In fact, our Church is really careful about officially naming something a relic, and rarely guarantees that a relic is authentic.

There are different stages or “classes” or relics.

**First class** relics are actual body parts of saints, like bones or limbs or hair... or tongues!

**Second class** relics are usually something used by the saint, like books or rosaries or some other special object... clothing would also usually count as a second class relic.

**Third class** relics are usually anything touched by the saint or touched to a first class relic.

Many altars (*in churches just like yours!) actually have a small piece of bone from a saint placed/built within them. This tradition goes back to the fact that many of the earliest Christians celebrated Mass in the catacombs (underground burial sites) so that they could be as close as possible to the holy men and women (saints!) who had died and were now in Heaven. The “altars” used for these catacomb Masses were usually the tombs/caskets of the saints buried there, which is why we put little pieces of saint bones in many altars today (in remembrance of these ancient, underground Christian Masses).

*OLG’a altar currently has 4 relics inside of it: St. Maria Goretti, St. John Vianney, St. Pius X, and St. Lucize.*

Pictures of RELICS and CATACOMBS on the next 2 slides!
RELICS

- St. Peter’s chains
- St. Francis of Assisi’s robe
- St. Ambrose
- St. Philip Neri
- St. Agnes of Rome’s skull
- St. Anthony’s skeleton
- St. Anthony’s tongue
THE CATACOMBS

The Crypt of the Popes
(In the Catacombs of Saint Callixtus, Rome, Italy)

Nickname: “THE LITTLE VATICAN”
7. What’s up with some of the “weird” things that have happened to the saints?

Some saints have “supernatural” miracles associated with their bodies and senses, including: **bilocation** (seeing saints in two places at once), **incorruptibility** (the body of the saint failing to decompose like most dead bodies do), **levitation** (floating), **locution** (receiving a private revelation from God, some kind of vision from Heaven), the **odor of sanctity** (sweet smelling aromas, sometimes like flowers, coming from the body of the dead saint), and the **stigmata** (wounds of Christ), just to name a few.

It’s interesting that not much is reported about these miracles, but they are real. Literally thousands of witnesses attest to seeing things like bilocation, the stigmata, and if you wanted, you could travel a bit and see the bodies of many incorruptible saints for yourself. These miracles (both during and after their lives) are seen as extra evidence for true holiness and closeness to God.
St. Joseph of Cupertino

Venerable María de Jesús de Ágreda

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Bernadette of Lourdes

St. Padre Pio
8. I heard that the Vatican is "de-sainting" saints, such as St. Anthony and St. Christopher. Is there any truth in this?

Oh yeah, we’re bumping them right out of Heaven! Just kidding.

In short, NO, the Vatican is not “de-sainting” anyone. When a person receives the title “saint” it means that they are believed to be in Heaven, and quite frankly we can’t kick anyone out.

Now, if you’re referring to saints on an official calendar of saints, that is a different story. Because the calendar of saints can be changed over time and is different in different countries, there are different saints that are more nationally known here in the United States then in other parts of the world. People can be taken off of the calendar of saints, but no one stops being a saint once they’ve made it.

So in the case of someone like St. Christopher, he’s never stopped being a saint; he’s just not on the calendar of saints anymore.
9. What is a *halo*, exactly?

It’s a popular video game.

And it’s ALSO...

... a “circle of light” that is seen in artistic interpretations of saints (or saintly people). It was originally used in Greek and Roman depictions of other gods, but early Christians began using it in connection with the *light* of *Christ*. That’s why, over the centuries, the halo began being seen and used in artistic representations of the Saints – to show how they glow with the light of Christ, and reflect His light to the world.