

Sainthood: Prayer Questions

As the US Liaison for the Causes of the Marianist Saints, I can get questions from people concerning how to pray for a miracle through the intercession of a particular Blessed or Venerable. With the help of **Paul Landolfi**, SM (1926 - 2017) and **Antonio Gascon**, S.M., who is our Postulator for the Causes of the Marianist Saints in Rome, I believe that some of these questions may be answered. Please read the article which is the correspondence between Fr. Paul and Fr. Antonio.

-Bro. David Betz, S.M.

Sainthood: Prayer Questions



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[Editor's Note: The following correspondence occurred between Father Paul Landolfi, SM, who asked the questions, and Father Antonio Gascón, SM, postulator general for the Society of Mary, who answered the questions related to intercessory prayer and causes for sainthood. Father Gascón's words were translated into

English by **Brother Michael McAward, SM.**]

From Father Landolfi:

Hi Father Antonio,

I have had some questions, and now I am being asked to answer these questions, so I come to be taught.

1. If we decide to pray for someone through the intercession of one of our "holy ones," must it be prayer to an individual (e.g., to Father Chaminade, or Faustino, or Father Lazaro, etc.)? What about prayer to the Marianist Martyrs together? What about prayer of the Marianist Family to all the saints of the Marianist Family (meaning the 14 presently being considered)?
2. If someone does take this route, what is the process he or she must go through for it to be called a miracle?
3. People may pray for intentions that would not be considered miracles. Is it important to keep a list of these?

Thanks very much.

Peace,

Paul Landolfi

From Fr. Antonio:

Dear Father Paul,

First of all, thank you very much for your enthusiastic interest in our Marianist causes and for sharing that enthusiasm with the Marianist Family in the USA. You raise some good questions which I hope to answer below and which will allow me to explain a little bit of the orientation regarding our approach to veneration of our Marianist causes.

Here are some succinct answers to your questions with commentary to follow:

- 1. A person may pray to whomever he or she wishes.** Therefore, invoking the "holy ones" as a group or as individuals is up to the person. You will recall that in our communities we invoke the "Marianist Martyrs" during the Eucharistic Prayer as a group, but Father Chaminade individually.
- 2. That said, you wonder what happens if a so-called "miracle" results from such group prayer.** This is a little more complicated. For an alleged miracle to be designated as coming about through the intercession of a person, it must be clearly linked to prayer to that person. This is nearly impossible to ascertain when the object of the prayer was a general group. Obviously, the main purpose of the request for a favor in prayer is the favor itself (a cure, assistance of some kind, etc.), and not as a way to get "credit" for a particular "saint-in-waiting." Nevertheless, to advance a particular person's cause, there must be a clear link of prayer to that individual, and not simply his or her presence in a general group.
- 3. Regarding those intentions "that would not be considered miracles" . . .**
 - a. It is important to distinguish between "favors" and "miracles." If I pray through the intercession of Father Chaminade that my son finds a job, and he finds one, that would not, most likely, be considered a

miracle, but a “favor” or a “grace.” It is not extraordinary that he finds a job, but we still consider it a gift from God, even perhaps a grace received through intercession. But, if the request is something extraordinary, and something that defies the usual course of events (a cure of an “incurable” disease, for example), this would be more the stuff of a miracle.

b. So, your third question, then, really refers to “favors” or “graces.” Should these be recorded and/or reported to the Postulator? The answer to this is that, while they will not directly advance the “official” cause of the person, they are evidence of a devotion to that person and a growing belief that this person enjoys the power of intercession. This presence of a “cult” is important, inasmuch as it spreads the knowledge of the person’s virtues and life-example, as well as makes clear the fact that the faithful venerate this person (more about this below). For that reason, there would be no problem with keeping a list which could be forwarded, as a courtesy, to the Postulator, who might choose to publish a list of these favors periodically.

All of these considerations bring up some distinctions which may be convenient to reflect upon:

- **Virtuous, Venerable and Blessed:** When the Church declares a person to be Blessed (and perhaps subsequently Saint), the Church declares publically that the person enjoys the Beatific Vision – is in heaven with God. This is evidenced by either their martyrdom or their intercessory action. Prior to the beatification, the persons whose causes have been introduced are either “Servants of God” or “Venerable.” At these levels, we do not (as a universal church) presume them to be in heaven. Locally, those with a devotion to them may so presume, but this remains purely private and personal.
- **Public Cult vs. Private Cult:** You already know that prior to beatification, there is to be no public veneration that might be done as for a Blessed or a Saint. All veneration of a Servant of God or Venerable is private. This is so as to avoid confusing the faithful regarding the status of a particular cause and to preserve the level of veneration appropriately reserved to blessed and saints. So, then how do we approach a veneration of the pre-blesseds? Private veneration is fine. Praying for intercession is fine. In fact, spreading the story of the person’s life, charism, or holiness is very good—in its own right as an example to the faithful and for the eventual advancement of the cause. But, it must be clear that what we are venerating is the person’s life here on earth, as a human being, inasmuch as it serves to inspire and inform our own lives. What we are not venerating (before beatification) is the public presumption that the person is in heaven with God. In simplistic terms, the difference might be like that between a hero and a saint. A hero is someone we find inspiring and after whom we want to model our lives. In fact, one of the early declarations of a person whose cause is introduced is that of “Heroic Virtues.” A saint, on the other hand, is one who is with God (including, of course the heroicity of that person’s life). Therefore, we have public veneration of Father Chaminade and our other blessed. They have official liturgical prayers, etc. For the others (pre-blesseds), we can publically highlight their lives, but not in a liturgical manner, but rather in a pastoral one. For example, if a group were to gather to explore the life and virtues of Faustino, this would be fine. You could have a picture of Faustino at the gathering, etc. But, to have his picture on an altar, with a candle lit, and the like, would be more akin to public, liturgical veneration than a private examination of his heroicity. I realize the difference might seem murky and technical, but trust you understand the nuances.

Well then, how best to promote our causes? I believe that what you are doing (and John Samaha has

done for many years) is a very good thing, namely, promoting the lives and virtues of our Marianist causes. We do so out of the belief that these people have something important to share with us today, namely the virtues of their lives and an ongoing example for our own lives. True, we would like their causes to advance, but much more importantly, we believe that their lives and examples, themselves, have much more to offer us than the prestige of a particular title. So, whatever you can do to familiarize people with their lives and virtues is the best thing you can do for their cause. As for advancement, most of that is in the hands of God, and it will come about only if we spread the stories of these special Marianists.

Finally, there is one important thing that we all can do to promote our Marianist causes: PRAY. Let us pray for the Canonization of our Blessed Founder and for advancement of the other causes.

Thank you, again, for what you are doing and may God bless your efforts!

Fraternally,

Antonio Gascón, SM
Postulator General