

Archbishop: It will be possible to display Padre Pio's body

SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO, Italy – Almost 40 years after his death, the body of St. Padre Pio shows uneven signs of decay, but can be treated in a way that will make it possible to place the body on display for the veneration of the faithful, the local archbishop said.

Archbishop Domenico D'Ambrosio, papal delegate for the saint's shrine in San Giovanni Rotondo, presided over the exhumation of the body in a service that began at 10 p.m. March 2 and ended more than two hours later.

In a statement released March 3, the archbishop said the exhumation and subsequent procedures would guarantee the "prolonged preservation of the body of our saint to allow generations to come the possibility of venerating and safeguarding his relics."

The statement said the body of the saint, who died Sept. 26, 1968, was in "fair condition."

Archbishop D'Ambrosio told reporters that the saint's hands were well preserved and "looked like they had just had a manicure."

The archbishop also said the saint's feet were clearly visible; the Capuchins traditionally are buried barefoot.

The Capuchins of San Giovanni Rotondo, who were represented at the exhumation, said the skull and parts of the upper body showed serious signs of decay, which was blamed on humidity in the coffin due to the fact that it had been placed in a new burial chamber and the masonry had not yet dried when Padre Pio was interred.

Padre Pio's remains have been moved to a room set up in the adjacent Capuchin convent where he lived for many years.

Technicians will use chemicals to prepare the body for long-term preservation.

The body will be placed in a new glass coffin and is scheduled to be in place for public viewing beginning April 24.