

Bodies of parents of St. Therese of Lisieux exhumed in France

WARSAW, Poland – The remains of the parents of St. Therese of Lisieux, France, have been exhumed as French Catholics await the couple's expected beatification.

"This beatification will be important not only for the church in France, but for families everywhere who've prayed for the intercession of this married couple, who lived in a different epoch but experienced the same strains as all parents," said Dominique Monvielle, director of Lisieux's pilgrimage center, June 4.

The bodies of Louis and Zelig Martin were disinterred May 27 from graves outside St. Therese Basilica in Lisieux and will be reburied after preservation work in the basilica crypt in September.

Ms. Monvielle told Catholic News Service that Pietro Schillero, a 6-year-old Italian boy whose cure from a fatal lung condition at 13 months was recognized as a miracle by the church in June 2003, attended the exhumation ceremony with his parents, who had prayed to the Martins for a cure.

Ms. Monvielle said St. Therese's parents, whose canonization process was launched in 1994, had "lived all the human realities of families" with a Christian faith, which "gave finality and sense to their sufferings."

"St. Therese is the greatest saint of modern times. But she also received a great deal as a daughter from her parents. The link between them has a message for families worldwide about the full human and spiritual upbringing of children," Ms. Monvielle said.

The Martins, four of whose nine children died in infancy while the other five entered religious life, would be the second married couple beatified after Italians Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi.

French newspapers reported a date could be announced July 15, when Portuguese Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes,

celebrates the 150th anniversary of the Martins' marriage in Alençon and Lisieux.

The Vatican declaration of their "heroic virtues" was issued in May 1994. Beatification is the second step in the sainthood process. At various steps of the canonization process, evidence of alleged miracles is presented to church authorities. In general, two miracles must be accepted by the church as having occurred through the intercession of the prospective saint.

St. Therese was the last of the Martins' children. She joined a Carmelite convent at age 15 and was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925. St. Therese died from hemoptysis, bleeding of the lungs, at age 24.