

# Can blessed automobile be auctioned?

*Q. A recent picture in a magazine showed Pope Francis signing a car that had been given to him. The cutline for the photo said that the pope had signed and blessed the car before putting it up for auction by Sotheby's in London, with the proceeds going to charitable work.*

*But I had always understood that, according to church law, blessed articles cannot be sold. Would you comment, please? (Bloomington, Indiana)*

A. What you saw in the magazine did, in fact, happen. In Nov. 2017, the Italian automaker Lamborghini donated to Pope Francis a new model sports car in the Vatican colors of white and gold, worth upwards of \$200,000.

The pope autographed and blessed the vehicle, which was then consigned to Sotheby's to be auctioned off — the proceeds going to three charities close to the pope's heart: the rebuilding of homes and Christian houses of worship in Iraq that had been destroyed by the Islamic State; assistance to women who had been victimized by prostitution and human trafficking; and specialized medical care in several African nations.

It would be safe to assume that the pope would not violate canon law, and that is true here. Nowhere does the church prohibit the sale of each and every blessed object. Like most priests, I am regularly asked to bless new homes, and there are specific prayers created for such a purpose. But imagine how infrequently that would happen if such a blessing were to result in the permanent prohibition of that house's resale!

What must not be sold are blessed objects of religious devotion — crucifixes, medals, rosaries, etc. Such objects are to be blessed only after they are purchased.

The Lamborghini company, I'm quite certain, never imagined the Pope Francis would put this donated vehicle to his personal use. That would have clashed with some specific guidance already offered by the pope. In July 2013, meeting with

seminarians and novices, the pontiff cautioned them against cars that were “showy.”

“I tell you,” he said, “it truly grieves me to see a priest or a sister with the latest model.” “Choose a more humble car,” he told them, and “think of all the children who are dying of hunger.” (That sensitivity is reflected in the pope’s own choice for traveling around Rome — a 2008 Ford Focus.)