

Father Patrick Peyton and road to sainthood/ Pray for Judas Iscariot?

Q. A friend told me recently that the cause of Father Patrick Peyton had been sent to the Vatican for sainthood. Do you know how it stands and when he might be declared a saint? (I hope and pray that it will be in my lifetime.) Also, what are the stages for someone to be declared a saint? (Albany, New York)

A. Father Patrick Peyton's cause for canonization (which was handled by the Archdiocese of Baltimore) rests right now with the Vatican's Congregation for Saints' Causes. In April 2015, the "positio," or official position paper, was presented formally to that congregation. That document, a 1,300-page report that studied his life and ministry for signs of heroic virtue and sanctity, had been prepared over four years, gathering testimonies from 35 different dioceses around the world.

The congregation is now in the process of reviewing that documentation. Following a favorable review, the cause would then be presented to the Holy Father and, with the pontiff's approval, Father Peyton would be declared "Venerable." Then, evidence of miracles attributed to his intercession would be studied and subjected to rigorous medical scrutiny; one documented miracle would be needed for beatification and another one for canonization.

Father Peyton, hailed throughout the world as the "Rosary Priest," died in 1992 at age 83. He promoted family prayer and coined the oft-heard slogan, "The family that prays together stays together." He organized rosary crusades in 40 nations that drew 28 million people and was a pioneer in using modern media to advance religious values, producing 600 radio and television programs using Hollywood stars and other celebrities.

There is no way to forecast exactly when his canonization might take place, but I, too, would feel a personal thrill in witnessing it. I was honored when Father Peyton invited me to write the foreword for one of his final books; and once, when he was then in his late 70s and in failing health, I ran into him in Rome.

He asked about my mother, whom he had known when he first began the Family Rosary organization in the 1940s. I told him that she was, in fact, visiting me that very week in Rome. Though I pleaded with him not to, he insisted on climbing the steep set of stairs to my apartment to see my mother and give her a blessing. I will always remember “Father Pat” not only as a very holy man, but a kind man as well

Q. Does it make sense to pray for salvation for Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus? It seems that throughout the history of Christianity, he has been vilified and no one has mentioned that, hopefully, he could have been forgiven for his sin. (Petersburg, Indiana)

A. It does no harm to pray for the salvation of Judas, and I admire your compassion. The church has never said definitively that any particular person is now in hell. It is possible, I suppose, that Judas repented for his sin and, in the silence of his heart, sought God’s forgiveness.

Matthew’s Gospel (27:3-5) says, in fact, that following the betrayal, Judas “deeply regretted what he had done” and returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests, saying “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” Of course, he then “went off and hanged himself,” but even that does not translate automatically to the loss of eternal salvation.

(Note that the church now offers a funeral Mass for a suicide victim — on the possibility that the person’s desperate state of mind may have precluded full responsibility.)

The problem, though, with Judas is that Jesus did say of him (both in Mt 26:24 and Mk 14:21) that “it would be better for that man if he had never been born” — which suggests to me that Judas never did achieve eternal happiness. I believe, though, that prayers are never wasted — and if the Lord cannot apply your prayers to Judas Iscariot, he will surely find someone else (who will be grateful for your efforts.)

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