

# Pope advances sainthood cause of 6-year-old Italian girl

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI has advanced the sainthood cause of a 6-year-old Italian girl who wrote letters to Jesus in the final stages of her illness.

If she is eventually canonized, Antonietta Meo would become the youngest nonmartyr saint to be recognized under modern saint-making procedures.

The girl, known by the nickname “Nennolina,” lived in Rome in the 1930s and had bone cancer. When she was 5, one of her legs had to be amputated, and she bore it cheerfully, saying she connected it with Jesus’ suffering.

As her disease worsened, she dictated poems or letters to God, Jesus and Mary. She died five months before her seventh birthday, and the letters were later cited as the record of a young mystic.

On Dec. 17 the pope approved a decree affirming the heroic virtues of the girl. If a miracle is attributed to her intercession, she could be beatified. Recognition of another miracle is needed for canonization.

The same day, the pope addressed the Vatican’s saint-making experts and encouraged them to keep finding new models of holiness to propose to contemporary society.

The pope said saints today “help make the words of the Gospel and the mission of the church more credible and attractive.”

“Contact with the saints opens the way to real spiritual resurrections, to lasting conversions and to the flowering of new saints,” he said.

The pope spoke to more than 300 postulators, the people responsible for presenting and defending the evidence in sainthood causes.

The pope noted that in January the church will mark the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of “Divinus Perfectionis Magister,” a document issued by Pope John

Paul II to simplify church procedures for the declaration of sainthood.

Pope Benedict said the process was less complicated under the new rules, but still retained the “solidity of research” needed before someone is made a saint.

The pope said it was important for the church to “propose ever new models of holiness” because people are convinced by real witness. He said there was evidence of a growing interest in the saints, on a religious and cultural level.

Postulators, he said, have a delicate task that requires careful discernment and objectivity. They and everyone involved in sainthood causes are called to place themselves “exclusively at the service of the truth,” he said.

Since his election in 2005, Pope Benedict has canonized 14 people. During that time, papal delegates have presided over some 50 beatification ceremonies.