

Pope signs decrees in causes for Blessed Serra, married couple, martyrs

By Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY – Although he already has said he will canonize Blessed Junipero Serra in Washington in September, Pope Francis formally approved a sentence by members of the Congregation for Saints' Causes recommending the move.

The sentence was presented to the pope during a meeting May 5 with Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, the Vatican announced the next day. During the same meeting, the pope signed decrees relating to the sainthood causes of another 12 men and women.

The decrees included recognition of the martyrdom of Oblate Father Mario Borzaga and Paul Thoj Xyooj, a lay catechist, killed by communist fighters in Laos in 1960. In addition, Pope Francis recognized the heroic virtues of Sergio and Domenica Bernardini, an Italian married couple who raised 10 children.

Eight of the children became nuns or priests, including the retired 86-year-old Archbishop Giuseppe Bernardini of Izmir, Turkey.

Born in central Italy near Modena in 1882, Sergio Bernardini lost his father, mother, brother, first wife and their three young children over a period of a few months in 1912.

Hoping to avoid painful memories, he immigrated to the United States and found work as a miner. However, he returned to Italy after just a year because, he said, he was afraid life in a mine was going to make him lose his faith in Christ.

He fell in love with Domenica and they married in 1914 and had 10 children. They were poor farmers, but generous to anyone who sought food or solace, especially during the difficulties of World War I.

Not only did six of their eight daughters become nuns and the two sons become Capuchin priests, but when Sergio retired, he and his wife "adopted" a Nigerian seminarian – paying for his priestly education in Rome out of their modest pension.

That seminarian today is 76-year-old retired Archbishop Felix Alaba Job of Ibadan, Nigeria, who was a co-consecrator at Archbishop Bernardini's episcopal ordination in 1983.

Sergio died in 1966 and Domenica in 1971. In her spiritual testimony, she said

everything led her to God – even by “kissing a rose, I kiss the beauty of God.”

She said her children were “my crown and my treasure” and wished she could find a way to express what a great gift it was to have so many children and vocations in the family. She prayed they would become saints and “be a force for good in the world.”

Pope Francis also recognized the miracle needed for the canonization of Italian Blessed Vincenzo Grossi, founder of the Daughters of the Oratory, and for Spanish Blessed Mary Isabel Salvat Romero, superior general of the Sisters of the Cross, who died in 1998.

The pope also recognized the miracle needed for the beatification of an 18th-century pastor in a small northern Italian town, Father Giacomo Abbondo.

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