

# You don't have to be a pope to be a saint

**By Christopher Guntz**

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"The pope must feel the deepest satisfaction with the first 12 months on the papal throne. His prestige among the faithful is immense. His influence on the 'separated brethren,' the members of non-Catholic Christian churches, is greater than that of any previous pope."

These words were not written about our current Pope Francis, but were published in the London Daily Express in October 1959 about Pope John XXIII.

John XXIII's personal secretary, now-Cardinal Loris Capovilla, remarked after the pope's death, "The pope is not concerned with the accumulated resentments of the past. He is seeking to bridge contradictions and he is struggling for unity." He also said, according to "A Pope Laughs," a 1964 book by Kurt Klinger, "Pastor Roncalli is a joyful pope, who likes to laugh. This is a very rare attitude for someone sitting on the Chair of Peter."

For all that is being said about Pope Francis breaking papal protocols, each pope puts his own stamp on the papacy. Pope John Paul II went skiing in the mountains of Italy. Pope Francis chose not to live in the apostolic palace. Pope John XXIII sent bottles of wine to men working on renovations in the room above his study after he went to seek the source of the hammering above his head, noting "the dust up there must give them a real thirst."

In this context, Pope Francis giving a sandwich to the Swiss Guard protecting his door looks a little less revolutionary and more, simply, kind - that is to say, Christian.

Being elected pope doesn't automatically make you a saint. It is not that being a pope makes a person holy, or that the job requires a saint. But about 30 percent of the 266 popes have been declared saints by the church, with numbers 79 and 80 - John XXIII and John Paul II - to be canonized April 27.

Both of these popes focused on the call to follow Christ to everlasting life. Pope John noted, "The life of mankind is a path to eternity, to heaven. One should follow it diligently so that blessedness may be unceasing."

John Paul told us about one of the paths to heaven: "There exists for man no source of hope other than God's mercy. To all, I would like to say: Have faith in the Lord. Be apostles of Divine Mercy."

Millions will converge on Rome in a few weeks for Holy Week and Easter

celebrations and the canonizations a week later. Many pilgrims are expected from Poland and Italy, where John Paul and John, respectively, were revered and loved. Their popularity around the world portends that crowds likely could quadruple the 1 million who attended the beatification of John Paul in 2011.

Many of us in the church today are the children of Vatican II, the council that Pope John convened and which Pope John Paul attended as an auxiliary bishop of Krakow. The effects of that council have shaped our lives and the practice of our faith for the past 50 years. For those born in the 1960s and later, it is the only church they know, except from history books and scholarly writings.

In one of the constitutions released by the Vatican Council, we are reminded that Christ is the light of all nations, and that it is our duty, called by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the Gospel to all and bring the light of Christ to all.

John XXIII and John Paul II each in his own way shined that light for us. The upcoming canonizations give us the opportunity to examine the holy lives and works of these two men.

It provides the opportunity to realize that we, too, are called to holiness. Being pope doesn't automatically make you a saint, but you don't have to be a pope to be a saint.

*To read more of Christopher Gunty's columns, [click here](#).*