

WHY DO WE NEED MORE SAINTS?

by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R.

This question is one that is often heard by those involved in proposing the causes of Servants of God for beatification or canonization. It is asked even more frequently since Pope John Paul II has become known as the pope who has canonized the most saints in history.

Because I am the promoter of the cause of the Servant of God Cardinal Terrence Cooke, the beloved Archbishop of New York who died in 1983, I am vitally interested in this question: "Why more saints?" November, the month of All Saints, is a good time to consider this question.

Holiness and the Spirit

The first reason that we have saints is because the Holy Spirit has guided the Church since its earliest days to identify among its members those who can serve as models in following the path of Christ. The saints are guides to holiness. They illustrate how the grace of God takes hold in the life of a poor sinner and turns that person into—well—a saint.

Since the very early days of the Church, Christians have been advised to pray to the martyrs and other saints and not for them—to use the words of Saint Augustine. All Christian Churches which existed before the Protestant Reformation always invoked the saints and still call upon them today asking for their intercession.

Holy Example

For example, in the case of Cardinal Cooke there are many reports of assistance that people believe they have received from God through his intercession. In some cases of physical cure these reports may eventually be examined as part of the process of evaluating miraculous favors through his

intercession. Some of these cases are astonishing. Although this aspect of the process of beatification is the one that receives the most popular attention, it is, in fact, the good example of living the Christian life by the Servant of God in his particular time in history that is really most important. For instance, in a time of theological upheaval and social unrest, Cardinal Cooke gave an example of humble, patient, and faithful commitment to the Gospel and to all the people of the flock that he served and, in fact, to all the people of New York. For this reason the whole city appeared to go into mourning during his final days and at his funeral. One particular incident comes to mind. I was recovering from heart surgery and took a taxi to the Cardinal's funeral. The Jewish taxi driver spoke very directly to me as I got out of the cab. He said, "My wife and I knew the Cardinal. It made no difference to him that we were Jewish. Everyone was the same to him. Mark my words, Father—the Cardinal was a saint."

That simple remark sums up a heroic life of suffering terminal cancer in silence for years, of patience with severe and unjustified criticism, of prayer and a deep devotion to Christ and Our Lady at a time of great disedification when many lost their way. Amazingly, Cardinal Cooke worked at least sixteen hours a day, seven days a week for nine years with terminal cancer. He never complained. In fact, a bishop close to him said, "He never even yawned."

Holy Heroes

Here was an ordinary though talented man who accepted an extraordinary responsibility and did his very best. When I first spoke to the members of the congregation, or office, in Rome that oversees the causes of the Servants of God, they reminded me that we are not seeking to prove that Cardinal Cooke was perfect but rather that he was heroic. He was. I've been privileged to know three or four people who are likely to be canonized. I can say that the example of the heroic virtue of Father Solanus Casey O.F.M. CAP., Mother Teresa, Father

Walter Ciszek, S.J., and Cardinal Cooke taught me more than anything I ever studied in books. To know the saints and Servants of God is to see the Gospel come alive in one's own time. Our times certainly need this example and that is the answer to the question, "Why do we need more saints?"

For more information please write to Sister Rose Patrice Sasso, O.P., Cardinal Cooke Guild, 1011 First Avenue, New York City, NY 10022.

Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., is the Director of the Office for Spiritual Development of the New York Archdiocese and a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. This article appeared in the Magnificat prayer book.