

Blessed John Paul II?

Author: **Edward Pentin** | Source: **NCRRegister.com**

Some believe it could happen by 2010.

Could John Paul II be beatified as soon as next year? Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz of Krakow, John Paul's long-serving former private secretary, believes there's a good chance.

The cardinal told Polish media at the end of March that Pope Benedict XVI "wants to close the cause as soon as it is practical," adding: "The world demands it."

Cardinal Dziwisz said John Paul's beatification could take place on April 2, 2010, the fifth anniversary of his death. (If it happens then, it will most likely fall on Divine Mercy Sunday, as that date will be Good Friday next year.)

According to Giacomo Galeazzi of the Italian daily *La Stampa*, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had recently undergone "a marked acceleration" in its work on the cause.

Consequently, he wrote March 18, John Paul II will be proclaimed blessed "earlier than expected" and added that only "new and unforeseen elements" could delay it.

But Vatican officials have played down the speculation. In an interview with Vatican Radio April 1, the prefect for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Archbishop Angelo Amato, confirmed that John Paul II's cause has accelerated rapidly since Pope Benedict XVI decided to waive the usual five-year waiting period required before opening a cause.

But he added that the cause "demands great precision in terms of methods and content, with respect for the established procedures. Promptness does not mean hurriedness or superficiality — on the contrary, it implies diligence and professionalism."

The diocesan phase of the process was concluded in May 2007, and the *positio* (documents assembled on the cause) were delivered to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the end of November 2008 for an initial review by theologians.

Archbishop Amato said: "Once it passes this review — and we cannot predict how long that will take — the cause will fall to the judgment of the Ordinary Session of Cardinals and Bishops."

The Holy Father will then likely declare him venerable, the penultimate step to beatification.

Archbishop Amato added that the alleged miracle under study must adhere to a strict procedure and be certified by two medical experts, then undergo a collegial examination by a medical team, and be scrutinised by theologians, cardinals and bishops. The results are then delivered to the Holy Father for his final decision.

"Once this procedure is concluded — which I repeat, out of respect for the importance of the servant of God, should be done with particular precision — an eventual date for the beatification can be considered," he said.

The thoroughness of the investigation will please some working at the Vatican who have been concerned that the process was being rushed through. One official told the Register that there is still much the Church hasn't been able to investigate about the former Pope, and so it might be better to wait until the Vatican archives on the pontificate are fully opened — something that won't happen for several years.

"If the Vatican moves too quickly, it will be in danger of beatifying a personality rather than the person himself," he cautioned.

On the eve of the fourth anniversary of John Paul's death, Pope Benedict XVI simply told Polish pilgrims he was praying for John Paul's beatification.

Cardinal Dziwisz moderated his earlier comments, saying "there is always hope" that John Paul II will be beatified before the fifth anniversary of his death. And in an interview with Polish TVN24 television, he said the process must go through all necessary stages "so there can be no doubt."

But he added there is no shortage of potential cases of possible miracles to investigate. Speaking to journalists after praying at John Paul's tomb April 2, Cardinal Dziwisz revealed that a 9-year-old Polish boy who was left unable to walk because of a kidney tumor suddenly started walking after being brought to the tomb in St. Peter's Basilica by his parents. "As soon as the boy emerged from the basilica, he told his parents: 'I want to walk.' He got up and started walking, healthy," Cardinal Dziwisz said.

Another case is that of a Texas woman who is said to have recovered from respiratory failure after being given up for dead. But the alleged miracle the Vatican is currently examining is that of French nun, Sister Marie-Simon-Pierre, who inexplicably recovered from Parkinson's disease after she prayed to John Paul.

As well as countless faithful praying for John Paul's beatification, actress Sophia Loren added her name to the cause. The 74-year-old star wrote to the Vatican recently saying the memory of John Paul II has been "jealously guarded in my heart," the Italian magazine *Chi* reported. "It is a daily memory," she said, adding that she prayed at the late Pope's tomb "to bear witness to my great admiration and devotion."

Pope Benedict XVI celebrated a solemn Mass in St. Peter's Basilica to mark the fourth anniversary of John Paul's death April 2. He encouraged the young people present, who were in Rome to celebrate the Diocesan World Youth Day, to follow the example of his predecessor, who did not accept any compromise when the truth was at stake.

"Since his youth," the Holy Father said, Karol Wojtyla "was an ardent and intrepid defender of Christ. For him, he did not hesitate to spend all his energy to transmit the light all around; [he] did not accept any compromise about proclaiming and defending his truth; he has never tired of transmitting his love."

During his long pontificate, Benedict XVI continued, John Paul "generated the faith of many children." He added: "How many vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, how many young families who decided to live the Gospel's ideal and move toward holiness are associated with the testimony and preaching of my venerable predecessor."

John Paul II, he said, was "an affectionate father and attentive educator" who "pointed out [the] solid reference points indispensable for everyone, especially for the youth."

In an interview with *Il Messaggero* April 2, John Paul II's physician, Renato Buzzonetti, recalled how the late Pope "didn't want to hide his impotence as a sick man — he was without conventional modesty but had instead the simplicity of the just."

The doctor, who now treats Benedict XVI, added: "Life for him had to be lived right to the end with no running away, no shortcuts. He accomplished a great catechesis."

Edward Pentin writes from Rome.

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