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Report: Beatification of John Paul II likely in 2011

John L. Allen Jr. | Jan. 4, 2011 NCR Today

According to a report by veteran Italian Vatican writer Andrea Tornielli, a miracle attributed to the late Pope John Paul II has been approved by both the medical and theological consulters of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

In effect, that clears the path for the beatification of John Paul II sometime in 2011. Tornielli suggests that the most likely dates would April 2, the anniversary of the pope?s death; May 18, his birthday; or October 16, the anniversary of his election to the papacy in 1978.

Although Benedict XVI typically does not celebrate beatification ceremonies himself, preferring that they be led by the local bishop and staged in the saint?s local diocese, in this case the beatification would be held in St. Peter?s Square in Rome and is expected to draw a vast crowd.

Before a date is set, the full body of cardinals and bishops who make up the Congregation for the Causes of Saints must approve the miracle and then submit their recommendation to Pope Benedict XVI.

The miracle claim in question concerns a 49-year-old French nun, Sister Marie Simon-Pierre, who was diagnosed with an aggressive form of Parkinson?s disease in 2001 and whose order prayed to John Paul II after his death in 2005 for help. Reportedly, after writing the late pope?s name on a piece of paper one night in June 2005, Sister Marie-Simone awoke the next morning cured and was able to resume her work as a maternity nurse.

Earlier this year, media reports implied that the French sister had fallen ill again, and that at least one physician questioned the original diagnosis of Parkinson?s disease, suggesting it may have been some other nervous disorder. The outcome of the examination by the Vatican?s medical consulters, according to Tornielli, suggests that those doubts have now been resolved.

In the run-up to the conclave that elected Benedict XVI to the papacy in April 2005, some cardinals signed a petition requesting that the next pope move immediately to opening a sainthood process for John Paul II. Benedict waived the usual five-year waiting period for opening the cause, but otherwise held that the usual procedure should be followed.

Benedict XVI signed a decree of ?heroic virtue? for John Paul II in December 2009, a document which asserts that the late pope lived a holy life and allows him to be referred to as ?venerable.? If the beatification takes place in 2011, it would mean that the late pope will become ?Blessed John Paul II.?

One additional miracle would be necessary prior to canonization, the formal act of declaring John Paul II a saint.

If the beatification does indeed take place in 2011, some observers believe that the October date may be the most plausible, given the logistical challenges of organizing what is likely to be the most massive public gathering in Rome since the events following the death of John Paul II in 2005.

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