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Canonization date for John Paul II, John XXIII to be announced in September

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Aug. 20, 2013
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Pope Francis will host a meeting of cardinals Sept. 30 to formally approve the canonization of Blesseds John Paul II and John XXIII; the date for the canonization will be announced at that time, said Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes.

The cardinal told Vatican Radio on Tuesday that only Pope Francis knows for sure the date he will proclaim the two popes saints, though he already implied that it is likely to be in 2014.

Speaking to reporters traveling with him from Brazil to Rome on July 28, Pope Francis said he had been considering Dec. 8, but the possibility of icy roads could make it difficult for Polish pilgrims who would travel by bus to Rome for the ceremony.

Another option, he said, would be April 27, the Sunday after Easter and the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, a celebration instituted worldwide by Pope John Paul.

Asked to describe the two late popes, Pope Francis said Blessed John was "a bit of the 'country priest,' a priest who loves each of the faithful and knows how to care for them; he did this as a bishop and as a nuncio."

He was holy, patient, had a good sense of humor and, especially by calling the Second Vatican Council, was a man of courage, Pope Francis said. "He was a man who let himself be guided by the Lord."

As for Blessed John Paul, he told the reporters on the plane, "I think of him as 'the great missionary of the church,' " because he was "a man who proclaimed the Gospel everywhere."

Pope Francis signed a decree recognizing the miracle needed for Blessed John Paul's canonization July 5; the same day, the Vatican announced that the pope had agreed with the cardinal members of the Congregation for Saints' Causes that the canonization of Blessed John should go forward even without a second miracle attributed to his intercession.

Before declaring new saints, the pope consults with cardinals around the world and calls a consistory -- a gathering attended by any cardinal who wants and is able to attend -- where those present voice their support for the pope's decision. A date for a canonization ceremony is announced formally only during or immediately after the consistory.

Except in the case of martyrdom, Vatican rules require one miracle for a candidate's beatification and a second for his or her canonization as confirmations that the candidate really is in heaven with God.

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