NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

It's official: Jesuit Fr. Peter Faber is a saint

John L. Allen Jr. | Dec. 17, 2013 NCR Today
Rome

Pope Francis on Tuesday essentially set aside the normal process for canonizing a saint and extended sainthood to arguably his favorite Jesuit, Fr. Peter Faber, a Frenchman who was an early member of the Society of Jesus and who died in 1547.

A statement issued by the Vatican press office at roughly 6 p.m. Rome time said Francis met today with the head of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Italian Cardinal Angelo Amato, and decided to "extend to the universal church the liturgical cult" of Faber, "inscribing him in the catalogue of saints."

In other words, as of Tuesday, Catholics around the world can refer to St. Peter Faber.

Technically, what Francis has invoked with this decision is called "equivalent canonization," a rarely used maneuver to bypass the normal procedures and ceremonies, generally justified by the fact that the candidates comes from a remote period of time and has an uncontested reputation for holiness.

John Paul II took the step three times and Benedict XVI once, and this is the first time it's been employed by Francis -- significantly, in order to elevate a fellow member of the pope's Jesuit order.

The story that Francis might take this step was first reported by *Avvenire*, the newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference, last month. The writer, Stefania Falasca, referred to Faber as "an important reference point for understanding the Pope's leadership style."

"Faber lived on the cusp of an era when the unity of the church was being threatened," she wrote. "He mostly kept out of doctrinal disputes and steered his apostolate towards a reform of the church, becoming a pioneer of ecumenism."

Francis has often spoken of his admiration for Faber, including in an interview in September with the Jesuit publication *Civiltà Cattolica*, which was picked up in the United States by *America* magazine.

In that interview, Francis praised Faber's "dialogue with all, even the most remote and even with his opponents; his simple piety, a certain naïveté perhaps; his being available straightaway; his careful interior discernment; the fact that he was a man capable of great and strong decisions but also capable of being so gentle and loving."

In the same decree, Francis also approved a miracle attributed to an American candidate for sainthood, Sr. Maria Teresa Demjanovich of the Sisters of Charity.

Born in Bayonne, N.J., in 1901, as a member of the Greek Catholic rite, Demjanovich died in 1927 after a serious illness. She enjoyed a reputation for deep holiness because of her spiritual writings and her perceived dedication to religious life.

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Source URL (retrieved on *08/02/2014 - 01:04*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/its-official-jesuit-faber-saint