



## From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

**We often make** the mistake of thinking of the saints as men and women who lived a long time ago. Several of the recent Deacon's Desks have highlighted modern-day individuals who have entered the path to sainthood. This week, we add another name to our discussion of saints.

**The path to sainthood** begins when a person is named "servant of God" and then moves to "Venerable." After a miracle is attributed to their intercession, they are named "Blessed." When a second miracle is recognized, the person is then named a "Saint."



**Pope Francis announced** recently that Albino Luciani is to be declared "blessed." He was born in Oct 1912 in northern Italy and was baptized by a midwife moments after his birth as she feared he was in danger of dying. Formal Baptism rites were administered a few days later. His parents [a bricklayer and a housewife] described him as a "restless child." Things changed, though, when he was only 10.

**A Capuchin friar**, followers of St. Francis, preached a series of homilies in his home parish. Shortly after that, he asked his father's permission to become a priest. His father gave his permission and told him: "I hope that when you become a priest, you will be on the side of the workers, for Christ Himself would have been on their side." He entered the minor seminary in 1923, just before his 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. His teachers complained that he was "too lively," but he completed his studies and moved to a major seminary. He was ordained a priest in 1935.

**Luciano was a gifted teacher** and scholar. He taught at his major seminary while earning his doctorate from the Pontifical Gregorian University, served as a parish priest, and held several positions in his diocese.

**In 1958 he was appointed** as a bishop and attended every session of Vatican II. He weathered several controversies and showed he had a great reserve of spiritual strength as he confronted a schism within his diocese. The Catholic residents of the village of Sarnede wouldn't accept the priest Bishop Luciano appointed, wishing to choose their own priest. For almost four years, the bishop would name a priest, and the people wouldn't accept him. Finally, the bishop visited the church and removed the Eucharist, leaving the church unblest. He suspended several priests who publicly endorsed the liberalization of divorce.

**Pope Paul VI died** in August 1978. At the Papal Conclave, he was elected as the new pope. When asked if he would accept the position, he replies, yes, but "May God forgive you for what you have done." He chose the name John Paul I. For the first time in church history a pope chose a double name. He also took the original step of applying the "first" to his name. Historically, that title wasn't used until after a second pope took the same name as a previous one.

**He took several steps** to "humanize" the papacy. He refused the traditional coronation and opted instead for an inauguration mass. He used familiar, rather than royal language – he dropped the regal "we" in both writing and speech, opting for the more familiar "I." His image as a warm, gentle, and kind man was evident from the beginning. The press named him "the smiling pope."

**While he was much loved** by the people [and the press], the same was not true in some quarters of the Vatican itself. He was the first pope in decades who had not first been a diplomat or an official within the Vatican [the curia]. Some considered him an intellectual lightweight and opposed his efforts to implement some provisions of Vatican II. His detractors unfavorably compared his sermons [which would mention such characters as Pinocchio] to his predecessors' academic/intellectual writings.

**Pope John Paul I** imitated an aggressive six-point plan for his pontificate that included promoting church unity and dialogue, world peace and social justice, and implementing the provisions of Vatican II. He faced some of the more complex issues of the era: contraception, abortion, artificial insemination [the first "test-tube" baby [Louise Brown] was born while he was in office], and women's ordination among them.

**In explaining the** implementation of Vatican II, he stressed that the Lord determined the church's structure. This structure cannot be changed. However, he taught, superstructures can, "Things that have not been determined by Christ, but were introduced by popes or councils or the faithful, can be changed, or eliminated today or tomorrow. "

**After only 33 days** as pope, John Paul I was found dead, presumably from a heart attack. His journey towards sainthood began in 1990 with an appeal from the Brazilian bishops. The lengthy diocesan investigation ended in 2006. Their completed investigation filled 3,600 pages in five volumes. The miraculous healing in 2011 of a young girl in Buenos Aires was attributed to the intercession of Pope John Paul I. His beatification will take place sometime in 2022.