

# Pope to canonize John Paul II and John XXIII in April

by [Eric J. Lyman](#)

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ROME (RNS) Popes John Paul II and John XXIII will be formally declared saints on April 27, 2014, the Vatican said Monday (Sept. 30). Pope Francis made the announcement during a meeting with cardinals gathered in Rome.

John Paul, who was pope from 1978 to 2005, and John, who reigned from 1958 to 1963, are considered two of the most influential religious leaders in the world in the last century, and they represent two poles in Roman Catholicism — John XXIII is a hero to liberals, while John Paul II is widely hailed by conservatives.

Francis said in July that he planned to canonize them together, the first time two former popes will be declared saints at the same time.

Francis seemed eager to make that pairing work, perhaps as part of his effort to try to heal some of the internal divisions in the church.

While John Paul was on the fast track to sainthood, the canonization process for John — who convened the Second Vatican Council and helped usher the church into the modern world — was moving much more slowly.

But Francis bent the rules so that a second miracle would not be required for John to clear the last hurdle for canonization.

The calls for John Paul to be made a saint started even before he was buried eight years ago last April: His funeral was marked by chants and banners reading “Santo Subito!” (Sainthood Now!) from the throngs of the faithful on hand.

Benedict XVI, who succeeded John Paul II, quickly bypassed the normal five-year waiting period after a person's death in order to start the meticulous process for declaring someone a saint. That cleared the way for what will be the fastest canonization ever in modern times. While John Paul's will take nine years, the sainthood bid of Opus Dei founder Josemaria Escriva took 27 years — currently the quickest known canonization.

Two miraculous cures have already been chalked up to prayers addressed to John Paul.

A Vatican spokesman said that Benedict, who has largely remained in seclusion since his retirement last February, would take part next spring in the canonization Mass, which is expected to draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to Rome.