



A picture of late magistrate Rosario Livatino is displayed during a beatification ceremony at the cathedral of Agrigento, southern Italy, Sunday, May 9, 2021. A magistrate slain by mobsters in Sicily and praised by two popes has been beatified by the Roman Catholic church on May 9 in the last formal step before possible sainthood. Rosario Livatino was gunned down on a Sicilian highway outside Agrigento as he drove to work in 1990. Three years later, during a pilgrimage to Sicily, Pope John Paul II hailed him a “martyr of justice and, indirectly, of the Christian faith.” (Fabio Peonia/LaPresse via AP)

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A magistrate slain by mobsters in Sicily and praised by two popes has been beatified by the Roman Catholic church on May 9 in the last formal step before possible sainthood.

Rosario Livatino was gunned down on a Sicilian highway outside Agrigento as he drove to work in 1990. Three years later, during a pilgrimage to Sicily, Pope John Paul II hailed him a "martyr of justice and, indirectly, of the Christian faith."

Livatino was beatified in a ceremony in a cathedral in Agrigento. Hours later, Pope Francis at the Vatican said Livatino worked to judge "not to condemn, but to redeem." As an investigative magistrate, Livatino, 37, had been leading probes into the Mafia and corruption when he was slain. He was known for praying daily before entering court.

Francis also praised Livatino as a "martyr of justice and of the faith," noting that the magistrate "always put his work 'under the protection of God,'" a reference to Livatino's motto. Describing Livatino as a "witness of the Gospel until his heroic death," Francis expressed hope that his example would inspire others to be "loyal defenders of legality and of liberty."

Shortly after meeting with Livatino's parents in Agrigento, John Paul II became the first pontiff to publicly decry the Mafia. In improvised remarks on May 9, 1993, at an outdoor Mass in the ancient Valley of the Temples, John Paul thundered against mobsters, demanding they repent their murderous ways.

Four gunmen shot at Livatino's car as he drove without bodyguards. The alleged masterminds and attackers were eventually arrested and convicted. The Agrigento area is a power base for the Stidda, a group of mobsters who rival Cosa Nostra, the Sicilian Mafia with its main stronghold in the Palermo area across the island. Helping in the prosecution was description from a northern Italian businessman who was driving by and witnessed the shooting.

For the beatification, Livatino's blood-soaked shirt was taken from investigators' evidence deposits and put into a glass-enclosed reliquary, a holder of relics for faithful who want to venerate those beatified.

The Vatican has been considering developing a doctrine about excommunicating Catholic mobsters. That drive followed a visit by Pope Francis in 2014 to the southern Italian region of Calabria, the stronghold of the 'ndrangheta crime syndicate, which is one of the world's biggest cocaine traffickers. Francis met with the father of a 3-year-old boy slain in the region's drug turf wars and declared that all mobsters are automatically excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

The Vatican's commission on human development on May 9 said that to honor Livatino a working group was set up to study "excommunication for mafias," an initiative which will involve bishops worldwide.

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