



Pope Francis is helped walking as he celebrates the canonization mass for ten new saints in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican, May 15, 2022. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

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ROME — Pope Francis created 10 new saints on Sunday, rallying from knee pain that has forced him to use a wheelchair to preside over the first canonization ceremony at the Vatican in over two years.

Francis stood for a long period at the start to greet priests concelebrating the Mass, presided over the nearly two-hour ceremony and then stood and walked for a good 15 minutes after it ended to greet dozens of cardinals and bishops. Vatican cameras lingered on the scene as if to showcase the pope's mobility and refute speculation about his health and the future of his pontificate.

Francis, 85, then took a lengthy, seated popemobile ride around St. Peter's Square and the boulevard leading to it to greet some of the tens of thousands of people who came out to celebrate the Catholic Church's newest saints. They include a Dutch priest-journalist who was killed by the Nazis, a lay Indian convert who was killed for his faith and a half-dozen French and Italian priests and nuns who founded religious orders.

Francis told the crowd of more than 45,000 that the 10 embodied holiness in everyday life, and said the church needs to embrace this idea rather than an unattainable ideal of personal achievement.

"Holiness does not consist of a few heroic gestures, but of many small acts of daily love," he said from his chair on the altar.

Francis has been complaining of strained ligaments in his right knee for months, and has recently been seen using a wheelchair at public audiences. Sunday's ceremony was evidence that Francis is still able to still walk, but appears to be taking it as easy as possible to let the ligaments heal before an intense period of travel starting in July: The Vatican has confirmed two trips that month, one to Congo and South Sudan and one to Canada.

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It was the first canonization Mass at the Vatican since before the coronavirus pandemic and, aside from Easter celebrations last month, drew one of the biggest crowds in recent times.

The Italian president, Dutch foreign minister, French interior minister and the minister for minorities of India, as well as tens of thousands of faithful packed the sunny piazza, which was adorned with Dutch flowers in honor of the Rev. Titus Brandsma, a martyr saint who was killed at the Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

In the runup to the canonization, a group of Dutch and German journalists formally proposed that Brandsma become a co-patron saint of journalists, alongside St. Francis de Sales, given his work to combat propaganda and fake news during the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. According to an open letter sent to Francis this month, the journalists noted that Brandsma successfully argued for a ban on printing Nazi propaganda in Catholic newspapers. There has been no immediate response from the pope.

In addition to Brandsma, the new saints include the 18th-century Indian convert Lazarus, known also as Devashayam, who mixed with India's lower castes and was considered treasonous by India's royal palace, which ordered him arrested and executed in 1752.

"He is for the poor people," said Arachi Syril, an Indian pilgrim from Kanyakumari who was in the square for the Mass. "He hated the caste system, still it is going on, but he is the martyr for that," Syril said.

Also canonized was César de Bus, a French priest who founded the Fathers of Christian Doctrine religious order and died in 1607; Luigi Maria Palazzolo, an Italian priest who cared for orphans and died in 1886; Giustino Maria Russolillo, an Italian priest who founded a religious order dedicated to promoting religious vocations and died in 1955; and Charles de Foucauld, a French missionary who, after rediscovering his faith as a young man, decided to live among the Tuareg peoples in the Algerian Sahara and was killed in 1916.

The four nuns are: Marie Rivier, who overcame a sickly childhood in France to become a nun and found a religious order and died in 1838; Maria Francesca di Gesù Rubatto, an Italian nun who helped found a religious order and died in 1904 in Montevideo, Uruguay; and Italians Maria di Gesù Santocanale and Domenica Mantovani, who founded religious orders and died in 1923 and 1934 respectively.