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Archdiocese Closes Cause for Atonement Society Founder



Father Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., drops sealing wax onto an envelope with Msgr. Robert Hospodar and Valerie Mastronardi watching as the archdiocese closed its cause and mailed documents for officials in Rome to consider in the canonization cause of Father Paul Wattson, S.A. MARY DIBIASE BLAICH



Posted Wednesday, March 15, 2017 1:39 pm

DAN PIETRAFESA

The archdiocese has officially closed an 18-month cause and submitted its work to Rome where it will be assessed whether Father Paul Wattson, S.A., should advance to the next steps necessary to become a canonized saint of the Catholic Church.

"It's an affirmation from above we've come this far," said Cardinal Dolan in opening a meeting on the matter March 9 at the New York Catholic Center in Manhattan. "I'm grateful to God but I'm also grateful to all of you. I sense that we have around the table people who are passionate for their devotion to the cause. Thank you for all you've done to bring us to this stage of the journey."

Father Wattson, born in 1863, was the co-founder with Sister Lurana White of the Franciscan Society of the Atonement, which consists of Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, at Graymoor in Garrison. The order was originally Episcopal but became Catholic when Father Wattson converted to Catholicism in 1909.

Ordained a Catholic priest in 1910, Father Wattson is perhaps best known for commencing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, now an international event held each January.

Franciscan Friars of the Atonement celebrated the closing of their founder's local cause at the meeting with priests and Cardinal Dolan.

"It's a day where a lot of things are being fulfilled," said Father Brian Terry, S.A., minister general for the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement. "Hopefully this message, which has been very absorbed locally in New York, can be a message that goes around the world. Father Paul started a small week of prayer on the top of a mountain in Garrison, and now it's a worldwide movement."

Father Terry noted he had a brief conversation with Pope Francis following a meeting last November.

"At the end, we had a chance to speak with him," Father Terry said. "So I gave him a prayer card knowing we'd be coming to this point and he really seemed sincerely interested. He said a saint of unity, a saint of healing, a saint of charity, that is something that is important."

Father Wattson died in 1940 at age 77. His cause for canonization was approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at their fall meeting in Baltimore in November 2014. The formal opening of the cause occurred at the New York Catholic Center in September 2015.

Father Wattson's writings, and writings about him, were collected throughout the next 18 months, then boxed and wrapped in brown paper with a red ribbon sealed by wax from a red candle stamped by Cardinal Dolan.

Father Wattson's collected materials were dispatched to Rome for a thorough review by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. It's a first step before Father Wattson is considered for beatification and canonization.

"Realistically, it's the work of God; what God wants is going to happen," said Msgr. Douglas Mathers, pastor of St. John the Evangelist-Our Lady of Peace parish in Manhattan and episcopal delegate for the archdiocese.

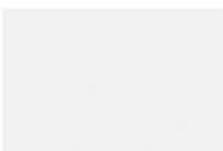
"We've done what we can do on the diocesan level and then it goes to Rome—however long it takes, that's what it takes. There is no time limit in the process."

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