



On Tuesday Pope Francis declared a new category of Christian life suitable for consideration of beatification called “offering of life” – in which a person has died prematurely through an offering of their life for love of God and neighbor.

Though similar to martyrdom, this definition fits those Servants of God who have in some way given up their life prematurely for charity, though the circumstances may fall outside the strict definition of martyrdom, which requires the presence of a persecutor.

The changes were issued in a Motu proprio July 11, which formally added the particular case to the paths by which a person under investigation for beatification may be discerned to be worthy, in addition to the traditional three paths: martyrdom, a life of heroic virtue and the very rare “exceptional cases.”

The change in norms was made with the support of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which studied the matter during a plenary session Sept. 27, 2016.

In the apostolic letter, Pope Francis wrote that “They are worthy of special consideration and honor, those Christians who, following in the footsteps and teachings of the Lord Jesus, have voluntarily and freely offered their lives for others and have persevered until death in this regard.”

“It is certain that the heroic offering of life, suggested and supported by charity, expresses a true, full and exemplary imitation of Christ, and therefore deserves the admiration that the community of the faithful usually reserves to those who have voluntarily accepted the martyrdom of blood or have exercised in a heroic degree the Christian virtues,” the Pope continued.

The document is titled “maiolem hac dilectionem,” or “greater love than this,” after the verse from the Gospel of John which says: “No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

There are six new articles, including the first making “the offering of life” a new particular

case in the beatification and canonization process, as distinguished from the particular cases of martyrdom and heroic virtue.

There are four criteria this case must meet in order to be “valid and efficacious” for the beatification of a Servant of God.

The first, that it is a “free and voluntary offer of life and heroic acceptance” – for the sake of charity – of a certain and non-lengthy death, showing “a connection between the offering of life and premature death.”

There also must have been the exercise, at least of an ordinary level, of the Christian virtues before the offering of life and up until the moment of death, as well as the existence of signs of and a reputation of holiness, at least after death.

And finally, the usual requirement of a confirmed miracle springing from the intercession of the Servant of God for beatification, after his or her death, must be in place.

The burden of responsibility for showing that an offering of life took place is on the diocese or eparchy submitting the positio – the collection of documents which give the evidence supporting the cause for sainthood – to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The remaining changes are largely an amendment of the pertinent norms from the 1983 documents "Divinus perfectionis Magister," Official Acts of the Holy See Vol. LXXV, and “New Laws for Causes of Saints,” to include the term “offering of life” alongside that of “martyrdom” and “virtues.”