

Modern miracles: Science meets sainthood

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In the Ideas section of today's Globe, I have a [story looking at medical miracles](#) and the canonization process in light of the Vatican's recent announcement that the healing of a local man's back pain was a miracle attributable to Cardinal John Henry Newman, who died more than a century ago and is now a candidate for sainthood. An excerpt:

"The very idea of miracles may seem deeply at odds with modernity - the word, for many, conjures up images of biblical events like the parting of the Red Sea, or the raising of Lazarus; or paranormal phenomena, like weeping statues and apparitions of the Virgin Mary. But miracles remain an official part of the church bureaucracy, in large part because two official miracles are necessary before someone can be declared a saint - one for beatification, and the second for canonization.

Pope John Paul II, in fact, canonized people at a record-breaking rate, and Benedict, although acting at a slower pace than his predecessor, is still declaring saints in historically high numbers. So over the last several decades, there has been a paradoxical confluence of two phenomena: at the same time that medical science has become increasingly adept at explaining how the human body heals, the Roman Catholic Church is in need of - and finding - an increasing number of inexplicable healings. The result is an unusual process, in which the Vatican has had to develop a medical expertise to help separate remarkable but understandable recoveries from those healings for which medicine has no explanation."

The Rev. James Martin, an associate editor at America magazine and the author of "My Life with the Saints," is quoted in the story; today [he blogged about his own views on miracles](#), writing:

"To my mind--and I'm being serious here--I figure that if God can create the heavens and the earth, raise his son from the dead, and so on (to say nothing of what his son's miracles during his earthly ministry) then something like healing someone from an incurable disease in the modern world is, by comparison, relatively easy. Plus, I've read plenty of medical reports surrounding the many verified miracles at Lourdes. And I've also seen and heard about what I would call 'minor' miracles in people's lives that remain inexplicable.

But belief in miracles raises a very difficult question for those who believe in them (including me): Why is one person "cured" while another remains ill? This is where those who do not believe in miracles have a very strong case: for if you admit of the possibility of miracles, then you have to grapple with the question of whether this means that God plays favorites. And many of my friends simply cannot abide that image of God."

http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles_of_faith/2009/07/modern_miracles.html