

# Did You Know?

- **Incorruptible saints**      **Incorruptibility** is the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox belief that divine intervention allows some human bodies (specifically **saints** and beati) to avoid the normal process of decomposition after death as a sign of their holiness. There are more than 250 incorrupt bodies of Catholic saints. Some examples:
- Saint Agatha, whose body was discovered incorrupt in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and whose body remains incorrupt today. She rejected the advances of a Roman prefect to maintain her virginity. She was imprisoned and tortured and was sentenced to death by burning at the stake in 251 AD, but was saved from this gruesome death by a mysterious earthquake. She later died in prison.
  - Saint Catherine LaBoure, to whom the Virgin Mary appeared in France in the year 1830 and who was directed to make the Miraculous Medal with the inscription "Oh, Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Catherine died in 1876, and when her body was exhumed 56 years later in the course of her cause for canonization, her skin was unblemished, untouched by decomposition, and her eyes were just as blue as when she was alive. Her body lies in a glass coffin in Paris. She looks as if she is asleep, not dead.
  - Saint Bernadette Soubirous, to whom the Virgin Mary appeared in Lourdes, France, in 1858, died in 1879. Her body was exhumed 30 years after her death, in 1909, during the cause of her canonization. Her skin tone was natural and untouched by the taint of death. Her body, too, resides now in a glass coffin in Nevers, France, and she appears to be taking a nap.
  - St. Rita of Cascia died in 1457. She is the patron saint of hopeless cases. Her body is not only incorrupt, but has been seen publicly changing positions within her glass coffin. Her eyes have opened and closed independently (without anyone touching them).
  - Saint Francis Xavier, the missionary priest whose passion was evangelizing the Far East, died in 1552. This saint's body resisted the most rigorous attempts at corruption. His body was buried in a wooden coffin in a small island off the coast of China. The next year, his body was shipped to Goa, India, a place he had evangelized and where he was much loved. Two layers of quick lime were heaped on top of his body to speed the decomposition process so that his body could be more easily shipped. Two and a half months later, the coffin was opened, and to the surprise of all, his body was incorrupt, fresh, and appeared alive; a sweet fragrance emanated from the body. More quick lime was added to the coffin, and St. Francis Xavier was shipped to Malacca. Upon opening the coffin, the body of the saint remained incorrupt and had the freshness of a living body. They buried his body without a coffin. Upon exhumation in 1637, his body was found to be stubbornly fresh with no decomposition. His body now lies in a glass coffin in Goa, India.
  - St. John of God was a peasant in Portugal. His selfless dedication to the poor gave him the name "John of God". He died in 1550 in Granada, Spain. When his body was exhumed during his cause for canonization, his body was found to be incorrupt except for the tip of his nose! His body is kept in a beautiful wooden chest in Granada, Spain.

- Padre Pio was a man renowned for his holiness even while he lived. He was blessed with the stigmata, the wounds of Christ; he could “read souls” and was therefore much sought-after as a confessor; his reverence and adoration of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament meant that Mass offered by Padre Pio could go on for hours as he conversed with Jesus present in the Eucharist; he was known to have the gift of bi-location and could be in two places at the same time. He died in 1968. His body was exhumed in 2008 during the cause of his canonization and was found to be incorrupt. His body lies in a coffin of wood and glass in Italy and is visited by more than 7,000 pilgrims a day.
- Saint John Neumann is the first American bishop and thus far the only male US citizen to be canonized. He died in 1860 in Philadelphia, and his incorrupt body lies in a glass coffin there.