

South Africa: Teacher Benedict Daswa beatified



Benedict Daswa beatification South Africa

A South African teacher who was killed for opposing witchcraft has become the first person to be officially beatified by the Catholic Church in the African nation.

Benedict Daswa was beaten to death by an angry mob in the village of Tshitani, Limpopo, in 1990 after he had refused to pay a herbalist traditional leader, known as "inyanga", who promised to end destructive storms in the region after a lightning strike had burnt several huts.

However, when Daswa argued that the incident was caused by the weather and not by witchcraft, he stirred outrage among the community, which stoned him and beat him to death with a stick. The suspected assailants were never charged due to lack of evidence.

Catholic Church's beatification and canonisation

Beatification is a process of the Catholic Church by which a deceased person is declared blessed and can be worshipped by believers. In order to be beatified, people have to deliver at least one miracle. The Catholic Church conducts independent investigations to verify whether the miracle has taken place.

Martyrs – people who are killed as a result of their refusal to abandon a religion or belief – can be beatified even if they have not delivered any miracle.

Beatification is the step that precedes sanctification, or canonisation, the procedure by which a person is declared a saint. In the Catholic Church, people are sanctified by the Pope after their "heroic virtues" are assessed. Two miracles are generally required for the canonisation. However, Pope John XXIII – who was declared saint in April 2014 – was credited with just one miracle. He is believed to have cured a nun who doctors said was dying due to internal ailment.

Daswa was proclaimed "blessed" in an apostolic letter read on behalf of Pope Francis by Italian Cardinal Angelo Amato during a mass in Tshitani, attended by some 30,000 people on Sunday 13 September.

"We grant that the venerable servant of God, Tshimangadzo Samuel Benedict Daswa, layman and family man... a zealous catechist, all-round educator who gave heroic witness to the gospel, even to the shedding of blood, from now on will be called Blessed," Amato was quoted by AFP as saying.

South Africa's President Jacob Zuma said the beatification restored Daswa's dignity and serves as inspiration to the whole world. He said in a statement: "This is a significant moment for our country and indeed the African continent as a whole. Such ceremonies are extremely rare in the history of the Catholic Church. This is the first ever beatification in southern Africa. We are truly humbled that a South African is being honoured in this manner.

"Mr Daswa was beaten, stoned and burnt to death for his beliefs on the 2 February, 1990, the very date on which Mr FW de Klerk announced the release of President Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of political organisations," Zuma continued.

"The beatification service will restore the dignity of Mr Daswa and inspire people all over the world to do good at all times even under extremely difficult situations."

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