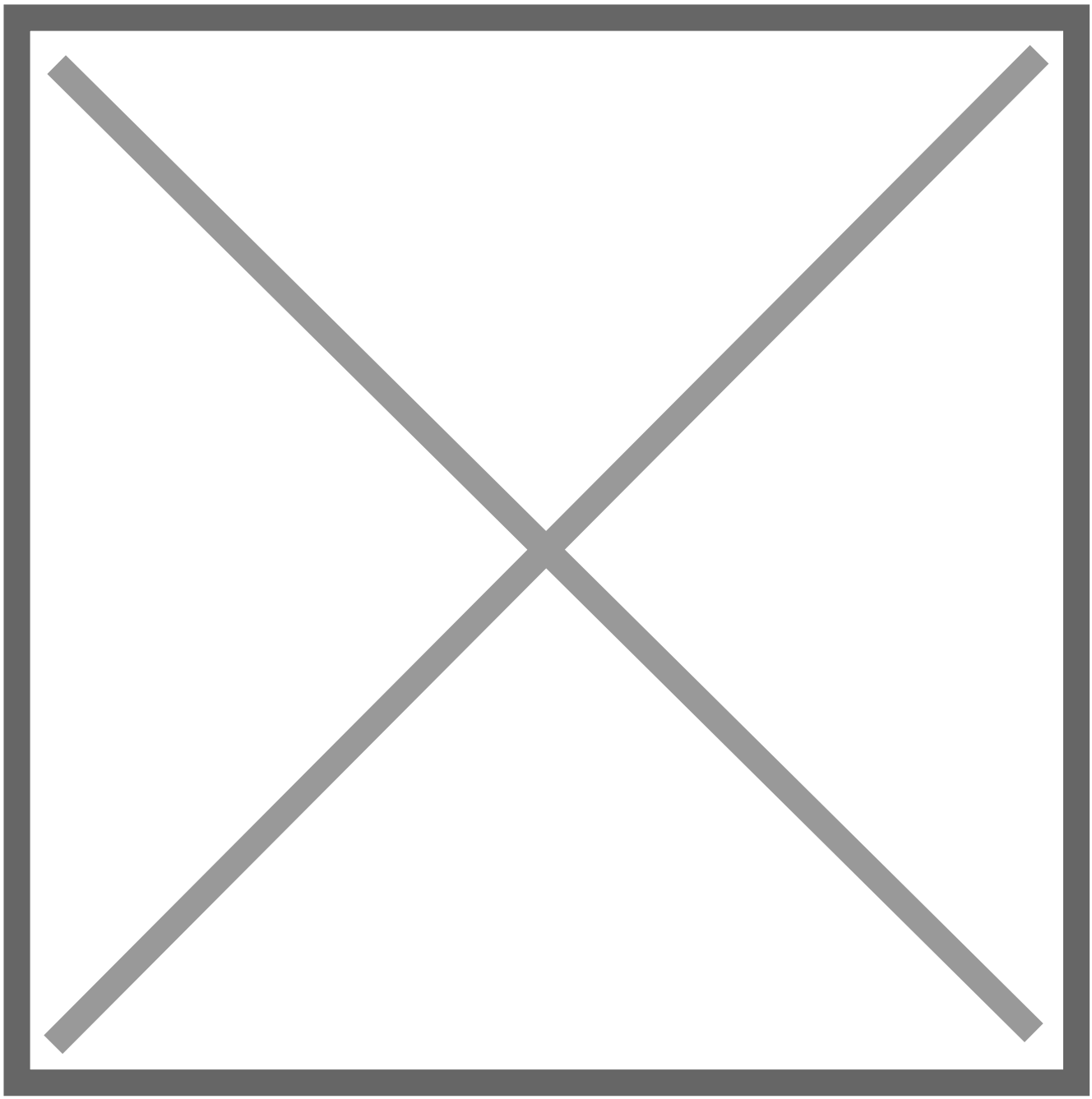
Vatican



Pope Francis and Cardinal-designate Marcello Semeraro of Albano are pictured in a 2019 file photo. Pope Francis advanced the sainthood causes of 127 Spanish martyrs, three Italian religious women, an Italian archbishop and three priests. The pope signed the decrees Nov. 23 during a meeting with Semeraro, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Pope Francis advanced the sainthood causes of 127 Spanish martyrs, three Italian religious women, an Italian archbishop and three priests. One priest distributed what would be valued today as $7 million in donations to people in need, including his own winnings from a soccer betting pool.

The pope signed the decrees Nov. 23 during a meeting with Cardinal-designate Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes. The Vatican published the decrees Nov. 24.

The pope recognized the martyrdom of Fr. Juan Elias Medina and 126 companions — priests, religious and lay men and women from the Archdiocese of Cordoba, who were killed "in hatred of the faith" between 1936 and 1939, during Spain's civil war. The decree clears the way for their beatification.

The pope also recognized the miracle needed for the beatification of Fr. Mario Ciceri, who was born in northern Italy in 1900 and died in 1945. Serving the Archdiocese of Milan, he dedicated himself to the pastoral care of young people, the sick, former prisoners and soldiers on the battlefront by publishing a newsletter for them. It was said he could never be found at home because he was always helping others, including doing their cooking and chopping wood.

When he was hit by a horse-drawn vehicle while riding his bike after hearing confessions, parishioners lined up to donate blood to help save him. He died two months later at the age of 44.

Among the other decrees, Pope Francis recognized the heroic virtues of Fr. Alfonso Ugolini, born in France in 1908. His family struggled to survive after they immigrated to Italy near Bologna, and his mother died when he was 12. Sometimes he had to beg for money when his father had to travel away for work.

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The local parish priest hired Ugolini to help at the church as a sacristan, secretary, catechist and handyman. Soon he found himself helping a huge influx of immigrants and others seeking work, housing or assistance. He created an association, well before Caritas Italy had been established, for raising and distributing funds and services to anyone who requested help.

He left behind accounting and registry books filled with thousands of names and addresses tracking people's requests and his follow-up calls and letters. In 15 years, he collected and distributed $800,000 in contributions, which, when adjusted for inflation, would be valued today at $7 million. He even donated his winnings from a national betting pool for soccer to help pay off others' debts and build a Marian chapel.

After his bishop invited him to consider the priesthood, he was ordained a priest when he was 65 and was known to spend hours each day hearing confessions. He died at the age of 91 in 1999.

The pope also recognized the heroic virtues of:

- Italian Archbishop Fortunato Maria Farina, who led the dioceses of Troia and Foggia. He was born in 1881 and died in 1954.
- Spanish Fr. Andres Manjon, who founded the schools of Ave Maria in Granada. He was born in 1846 and died in 1923.
- Sr. Maria Carola Cecchin, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph Benedict Cottolengo. She was born in Italy in 1877 and left in 1905 to do mission work across Kenya. She was asked to return to Italy in 1925 and was already ill. She died aboard a steamship on the Red Sea and was buried at sea at the age of 48

in 1925.

- Italian Poor Clare Sr. Maria Francesca Ticchi. Born in 1887, she died in 1922 at the age of 35 after numerous illnesses.
- Italian Sr. Maria Francesca Giannetto, member of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. She was born in 1902 and died in 1930 of pulmonary tuberculosis when she was 27.