News

Mourners walk past the casket of Archbishop Hélder Câmara in Recife, Brazil, Aug. 28, 1999.

Mourners walk past the casket of Archbishop Hélder Câmara in Recife, Brazil, Aug. 28, 1999. The current archbishop of Olinda and Recife said in November 2022 that Dom Hélder, as he was known, may soon be declared venerable. (CNS photo/Reuters)

by Catholic News Service

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The Vatican has advanced the sainthood cause of the late Archbishop Hélder Câmara of Olinda and Recife, who may soon be called "venerable."

Archbishop Fernando Saburido of Olinda and Recife made the announcement during the closing ceremony of the 18th National Eucharistic Congress.

Câmara, one of the founders of the Brazilian bishops' conference, was named to Olinda and Recife in 1964, three weeks before the beginning of the military coup that started the 20-year dictatorship in Brazil.

Days after the coup, the archbishop released a manifesto supporting the Catholic workers' action in Recife. The new military government accused him of being a demagogue and a communist, and he was forbidden to speak publicly.

"If I give bread to the poor, everyone calls me a saint. If I show why the poor have no bread, they call me a communist and a subversive," the archbishop is said to have said during that time.

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Dom Hélder, as he was known, remained a strong critic of the regime, denouncing human rights violations committed by police authorities.

In 1972, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and by 1985, when he retired, he was credited with having organized more than 500 base ecclesial communities, which use Bible study and prayer to address social or economic problems.

In 2015, 16 years after his death, the process of canonization of the archbishop was opened and later, with the authorization of the Holy See, he received the title of Servant of God.

Before he can be declared "venerable," his cause must be approved by two other Vatican commissions and Pope Francis. The next two steps toward sainthood, beatification and canonization, usually require a miracle attributed to the candidate's intercession.