Do you have to be dead to be a saint?

In the Roman Catholic Tradition, the answer to that is “Yes”. The canonization process requires five steps: typically, a local bishop can open an ‘investigation’ after a person’s death (there is usually a waiting period of five years), and if sufficient evidence is found of ‘heroic virtue’ or martyrdom, a person might receive the recognition “Servant of God”.

Further investigation can then lead to the title “Venerable Person” (which signifies what’s termed ‘heroic virtue’), then if the candidate hasn’t been martyred, a miracle must be verified and attributed to that person's continuing influence after death (and at this point, the person is called “Blessed”).

For a non-martyr, a second miracle must be attributed to the candidate; for a martyr, just one miracle is required, before the Pope makes the final decision.

In the Anglican Communion, the process of recognising ‘sainthood’ is much less formal:

- an initial recognition, at local level, of 'good works’ and righteous living that can be attributed to ‘candidates’
- if appropriate, their ‘saintly lives’ can be recognised and adopted throughout the wider Communion
- then may follow official commemoration and celebration - given that each province can have its own calendar for this.
- And there are, of course, many ‘shared saints’, as you can see by consulting the Lectionary…

Thought for the Week: Why are saints important to the Church?

Irrespective of the traditions and procedures (both formal and less so), it occurs to me that saints have a number of things in common; they have demonstrated, in the way they have lived, that they have:

- Put God ahead of self, and committed to His way of doing things
- Lived a life of prayer as an expression of their faith and trust
- Shown a generous and caring love for human beings, in word and in deed
- Ben prepared to take risks, trusting God in doing so
- Shown humility, by attributing all that they were, and all that they had, to God, and served Him by serving others.

Saints were people of their times. They were often far-from-perfect; they made mistakes, but always ‘came back to God’. And investigating their life-stories can surely be an encouragement to us to not just venerate them, but to emulate them.

So, we pray:

We give you thanks, Lord God, for the whole company of your saints in glory, with whom in fellowship we join our prayers and praises; by your grace may we, like them, be made perfect in your love.

And as we go out into the world, day by day, help us to entrust the past to your mercy, the present to your love and the future to your wisdom.