SOME THOUGHTS ON THE VENERATION OF RELICS

St. Raphael Cathedral, Dubuque, IA

During November, the month of the Holy Souls, and throughout the church year we are mindful of those among family and friends who have died. We may find comfort in reminders of their lives and of their love. Such reminders can take many forms: a cookie jar from grandmother’s kitchen, well-worn rosary beads in a shabby leather case, a child’s toy, a Christmas ornament. All can hold memories and inspire our gratitude, our smiles, and perhaps our tears.

As we look back through history we become aware that the custom of showing respect for the dead does not begin with us. It is, in fact, pre-Christian in origin. An attitude of deference toward those who have died is among the very primitive human instincts and is associated with many religions worldwide. As we look back through church history we find that the veneration of the mortal remains (especially of those believed to be particularly heroic, virtuous or saintly) is as old as the church herself.1 Examples abound. When St. John the Baptist was martyred, Scripture tells us that his body was claimed and given proper burial by his grieving followers (Matthew 14:12).

Not only do many religious peoples regard the human body as holy (that which was a temple of the Holy Spirit), they may also attribute special powers to objects owned or touched by God’s holy ones. An example of this belief can be seen in the life of Jesus himself. As Jesus made his way through a crowd (Luke 8: 43 ff.) a woman long afflicted with hemorrhages “came up behind and touched the tassel on his cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped.” In the Acts of the Apostles (19:11-12) we read of other commonplace objects believed to heal, to cure, to return the sick to wholeness: “So extraordinary were the mighty deeds God accomplished at the hands of Paul that when face cloths or aprons that touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases left them.”

In the second century a popular bishop named Polycarp was burned at the stake for his religious beliefs. His remains were gathered and reverently placed in a tomb where people of faith later celebrated Mass and recalled the life of their martyred pastor with gratitude, gladness and joy. During years of persecution, church members often gave the remains of the martyrs a final resting place in the catacombs of ancient Rome. There the devout gathered secretly for the celebration of Mass on the tombs of the saints. This practice seems to have given rise to the tradition of placing a small relic in the altar of each church – a tradition that persisted down through the years. Many churches still have an “altar stone” which houses the relic of a saint and speaks to worshippers of those who suffered and even gave their lives for the faith.2

1 The Incarnation brought a quantum leap in the way . . . human bodies were lifted to a new level . . . “bearers of the divine holiness.” (Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity, Gerald O’Collins SJ and Mario Farrugia SJ, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003.)

2 “The custom of placing small relics of martyrs or other saints in an altar stone and setting this in the mensa has changed since the Second Vatican Council. . . Relics are no longer placed on the altar or set into the mensa as an altar stone.” (Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture & Worship, USCCB, 2000).
Traveling Relics  Relics have long been prominently displayed in prestigious churches and cathedrals but it was often impossible for those living in rural places to travel distances to gain inspiration from the lives of saints remote both in time and in geography. Consequently, during the Middle Ages, priests and religious frequently traveled the countryside carrying with them the relic of a saint. In this way smaller settlements, towns and villages were reached and catechized by the sharing of a story of the heroic and virtuous life of a stranger.

Traveling Pilgrims  In Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales we learn of a group on an April pilgrimage and of a storytelling contest engaged in by those making their way to the tomb of St. Thomas a Becket the beloved Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-1170) murdered by followers of King Henry II. (Yes, there was a prize for the best story, a free meal at the Tabard Inn, Southwark, on the homeward leg of the journey!)

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST INEVITABLE “DECEPTIONS”

The widespread popularity of relics eventually led to many abuses including illicit trade in relics, and growth of a market for counterfeits. Among Celtic peoples, for example, there is a long and colorful history which the Catholic Encyclopedia describes as “The strange adventures of sacred remains carried about” [e.g., by St. Patrick, St. Senan and St. Mura in their wanderings]. Ecclesiastical authorities struggled over time to establish safeguards against deception and through the ages have -- with varying degrees of success -- developed various litmus tests of authenticity. Despite these efforts, it must be said that Rome itself has not been immune from abuses and highly questionable relics have occasionally become objects of popular piety even there (e.g., the “boards of the Crib of the Infant Jesus at the basilica of St. Mary Major / Santa Maria Maggiore). In the Holy Land an overly credulous traveler might still succumb to the banter of the unscrupulous tour guide who draws visitors around a large, flat stone inviting them to see there the imprint of the ball of a foot and divine toes launching Jesus in his Ascent into Heaven!

As part of the effort to exercise some semblance of control over the trade in relics, the church has declared that for a relic to be used for public veneration it must be accompanied by a document of authenticity signed by a duly appointed, authorizing official.

TYPES OR “CLASSES” OF RELICS

First Class Relics would include things associated in some way with the Life, Passion and Death of Our Lord, e.g., fragments of the cross on which Jesus was crucified, (thought to have been discovered by St. Helena). Other first class relics may include bones (ex ossibus) or hair (ex crinibus); the mortal remains of those called “saints of God.”

Second Class Relics would include personal affects of a saint, e.g., a breviary or other books, medals, fragments of clothing such as a veil (ex velo).

Third Class Relics would include pieces of cloth or other items that had been touched to a first or second class relic.
Ideally, a relic is identified in three ways. First, we are told what the relic is. A Latin description indicates, for example, *ex bacula (from the staff)*. The fragment was taken from the staff or walking stick of a deceased person. Second, we are told the name either in full or in a kind of “shorthand,” so we might read “Saint Agnes.” Third, we learn a little bit about the person (VM would indicate that Agnes was a Virgin and a Martyr). Many of the relics in the St. Raphael Cathedral collection are only partially identified so we are left with many mysteries. It is sometimes, but not always possible to resolve questions through further research (e.g., “S. Gre Ny” turns out to be Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop and Doctor of the Church).

_Gratitude is expressed to Sister Deanna Carr, BVM who prepared this description of relics and who also codified all the saints found in the Cathedral._
ST. RAPHAEL CATHEDRAL’S COLLECTIONS OF RELICS

A Sampling

Corridor of Saints “C” Set of three identical Cruciform Reliquaries, free-standing, ornate brass metal work. On the base of each, an “eye of God” signifying God’s perpetual watchfulness over creation. Also on the base of each, an image of the “Lamb of God.” Surrounding the relics, images of God’s abundant harvest “fruit of the vine.” Overall size of each reliquary: 20 x 9 ¼ inches.

“C-1” First of Three: St. Vincent de Paul (legible) five other names obscured

“C-2” Second of Three: St. Bartholome (legible) five other names obscured

“C-3” Third of Three: Inscriptions illegible

Corridor of Saints “D” Set of six identical reliquaries affixed to wall. Ornate wood carving. “Cathedral Window” motif. Overall size of each reliquary: 28 x 10 inches.

“D-1” First of Six (clockwise):

- Sepulchre of B.M.V. (from the coffin of the Blessed Virgin Mary)
- Ex praesepis D.N. (from the birthplace of Our Lord)
- Ex Sepulerali D.N. (from the burial place of Our Lord)
- Joann Bap (John the Baptist)
- S Petri Apos (St. Peter, Apostle)
- S. Paoli Apos (St. Paul, Apostle)
- S. Clem I P.M. (St. Clement I, Pope and Martyr)
- S. Joannis A.E. (St. John, Apostle and Evangelist)
- S. Patriti Ep. (St. Patrick, Bishop of Ireland)
- S. Apoll V.M. (St. Apollonia, Virgin and Martyr)
- S. Agneti Verg (St. Agnes, Virgin)
- S Agatha V.M. (St. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr)

Uppermost cluster of two: S. P X Oss (St. Pius X, Pope, relic from bone) and S. Clem HoF (St. Clement, Pope)
“D-2” Second of Six (Clockwise):
  ❖ S. Ignatii Loy (St. Ignatius Loyola)
  ❖ S. Alphons de Li (St. Alphonsus Liguori)
  ❖ S. Stanislaus Kostka
  ❖ S. Dominici C (St. Dominic, Confessor)
  ❖ S. Vinc LeM (St. Vincent, Deacon and Martyr)
  ❖ S. Vinc A Pa (St. Vincent de Paul, Founder)
  ❖ S. Aureliae M (St. Aurelius, Martyr)
  ❖ S. Letantiae M
  ❖ S. Marcellianae M
  ❖ S. Spei V.M.
  ❖ S. Eustac M (St. Eustace, Martyr)
  ❖ S. Urbanac M (St. Urban, Martyr)

Note: Undecipherable longhand script at top of reliquary.

“D-3” Third of Six (Clockwise):
  ❖ S. Cath Sen V (St. Catherine of Sienna, Virgin)
  ❖ S. Rose lim V (St. Rose of Lima, Virgin)
  ❖ S. Fran X (St. Francis Xavier)
  ❖ S. Io Chrr ED (St. John Chrysostom, Bishop and Doctor)
  ❖ S. Bona ED (St. Bonaventure, Bishop and Doctor)
  ❖ S. Bern AD
  ❖ S. Benedic Ab (St. Benedict, Abbot)
  ❖ S. Gre Ny Ed (St. Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop and Doctor)
  ❖ S. Hier Pr D (St. Jerome Hieronymus, Priest and Doctor)
  ❖ S. Antonii (St. Anthony)
  ❖ S. Leoni IPD
  ❖ S. Pancrati M (St. Pancras, Martyr)

Note: Topmost Cluster of Relics
  ❖ S. Thomas Aquinas D (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor)
  ❖ S. Franc Sal E (St. Francis de Sales, Bishop)
  ❖ S. Franc Ass (St. Francis of Assisi)

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Freestanding Reliquary (17 ½ x 22 inches) Located on Window Sill
Corridor of the Saints
Documentation Translated from the Latin
By Father Thomas Caldwell SJ of Marquette University
We, Ignatius, by the mercy and favor of the apostolic See prince archbishop of Salzburg
Born legate of the apostolic See, primate of Germany
To all and each individually we affirm and attest that we have,
To the greater glory of God and the veneration of his saints,
Canonically examined the sacred items:

- Particles of the manger of our Lord,
- Of the column at which he was scourged,
- Of the [cross?] of Our Lord on Mount Calvary,
- Of the house of Loreto, of the veil of the B.V.M.,
- Of the scarf of St. Joseph her spouse,
- From the place of an apparition of St. Michael the Archangel,
- From the house of the patriarch Jacob,
- From the habit of St. Francis of Assisi,
- And from the bones of all the male and female saints
  Whose names are invoked in the litany of the saints.
We have taken care to have these items reverently collected
In 50 gilded capsules protected by a single glass and joined
By a metallic thread marked by my seal.

In testimony of this we have ordered this testimonial letter
Especially fortified by my delegated seal and signature.
Salzburg May 10, 1930
By order of Sac(sacristan?) Ludwig Wegurian

Holy particles from the bones of St. Joseph archbishop and martyr
St. Januarius, bishop and martyr
St. Blasé, bishop and martyr
St. Sebastian, martyr
St. Cautionius, bishop and martyr
St. Cassian, bishop and martyr
St. Engelbert, bishop and martyr
St. Cornelius, priest and martyr
St. Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem and martyr
St. Maximilian, bishop and martyr
St. Lucian, priest and martyr
St. Pieiri, priest and martyr
St. Vitus, martyr
St. Pancratius, martyr
St. Olympius, martyr
St. Valerius, martyr
St. Theodore, soldier and martyr
St. Tiburtus, martyr
SS. Basilissa and Gerasina, virgins and martyrs
SS. Ursula and Cordula, virgins and martyrs
St. Juliana, virgin and martyr
St. Dorothy, virgin and martyr

“E-3” Part Three of Three

Sacred particles from the bones of
St. Victoria, virgin and martyr
St. Sophie, virgin and martyr
St. Hubert, bishop and confessor
St. Corbinian, bishop and confessor
St. Godhard, bishop and confessor
St. Lambert, bishop and confessor
St. Othon, bishop
St. Luttus, bishop and confessor
St. Alexander Sauli, bishop
St. Modestus, bishop and confessor
St. Anthony, abbot
St. Cuniphrus, hermit
St. Hyac, confessor
St. Joseph Calasanctius, founder
St. Henry, emperor
St. Cunegundus, virgin and widow
St. Scholastica, virgin
St. Gertrude, virgin
St. Appollonia, virgin and martyr
St. Bibiana, virgin and martyr
St. Candida, virgin and martyr
St. Columba, virgin and martyr

And from the blood of St. Theresa of Carmel, virgin
And from the undertunic of Blessed Theresa Margaret of the Heart of Jesu

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- S. Luciae VM (St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr)
- S. Caeciliae VM (St. Cecelia, Virgin and Martyr)
- S. Cathar V (St. Catherine, Virgin)

- S. Caroli BOE
- S. Alph D Li E (St. Alphonsus of Liguori, Bishop and Founder)
- S. Vincent de Paul
- S. Ignatii Loy (St. Ignatius of Loyola, Founder)

Note: Topmost Cluster of Relics
- S. Laur. Lev M (St. Laurence, Deacon and Martyr)
- S. Brigit V.D. (St. Brigit of Kildare, Virgin and Doctor)
- S. Colum V.M. (St. Columba, Virgin and Martyr)

“D-5” Fifth of Six (Clockwise):
- S. Fran of Ass (St. Francis of Assisi) Center
- S. Fidel (St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, Priest and Martyr)

- B. Ang A (Blessed Angelina of Marciano, Abbess)
- S. Jos Le (St. Joseph)

- S. Ber AOPL
- S. Seran ASI
- D. Ben a rb

- S. Veronica
- S. Crisp VIT
- S. Felic. Ca
- B. Ber. AC
- D. Laur AB (Deacon Laurence possibly)

Topmost cluster includes S. Berisi S. Merusiae Vut M and S. Berenieis PNEL

“D-6” Sixth of Six (Clockwise):
- S. Francis Salesi (St. Francis de Sales)
- S. Spei VM
- D. NJ ch
- De Praesep
- S. Victoriae

- S. Berenieis
- S. NJ Ch Nazareth DNJCh
- Ex Mensa
- S. Berisima

Note: Fragile. Condition issues. Topmost saint is S. Willibrord
Corridor of Saints “F”  Semi-circular reliquary. Glass and metal. In disrepair. Dimensions: 10 ½ x 19 ½ inches.  (Left to Right)
  ❖ S. Fidelis (St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, M)
  ❖ No legible inscription
  ❖ S. Amand M.
  ❖ No legible inscription
  ❖ S. Mauritius

Corridor of Saints “G”  Framed Collection 10 x 12 inches.
S. Fortunati M.        S. Fortunatae M
S. Fausti M            S. Faustae M
S. pii 1 ppm           S. Julipil pp
S. Cleti ppm           S. Sixtus M pp
S. Sixti ppm           S. Pauli pp
S. Sixti II ppm        S. Zosimi pp
S. Felicis II ppM      S. Sergii pp
S. Lucii ppm           S. Leonis IV pp
S. Caji ppm            S. Leonis I pp
S. Victoris pp         S. Leonis II pp
S. Soteri ppM          S. Eusibii pp
S. Lini ppM            S. Agropilii pp
S. Dignae M            S. Digni M
S. Diodori M
S. Donatae M
S. Eutropiae M

(Across the Center “Titulo ss. Crux” from the title board of the Cross of Christ)

Circular Arrangement:
Sepul ss vm
Annae MAT
Jer
Franc. IAU
Latn . . . p
Eutropii M
Donati M

Corridor of Saints “H”  Within a single frame, two relic “tapestries” each 6 ¼ x 8 ½ inches (overall size of frame is 17 x 24 inches)
Each containing six months of saints arranged by the day.\textsuperscript{3} Gold, beige and green colors used throughout.

\textbf{“H-1” First relic “tapestry” top line:}
Ex Antro Ag. (from Cave)
Ex Praese DN (from birthplace of Our Lord)
Mensae Chris (from table of Christ)
Ex Sepul. DN (from Sepulcher of Our Lord)

\textbf{First relic “tapestry” second line:}
Januarius
1\textsuperscript{st} S. Fulgent Ep

Februarius
1\textsuperscript{st} S. Severi Epis.

Martius
1\textsuperscript{st} S. Nicephori M

Aprilis
1st S. Theodor VM

Majus
1 SS. Phil. Jac. Ap

Junius
1 S. Petronil V.

\textit{Following – the complete listing for each of the first six months of the year.}

\textbf{January 2\textsuperscript{nd}} S. Macarius Ab 3\textsuperscript{rd} S Primi Marts 4\textsuperscript{th} S Aggaei Mart 5\textsuperscript{th} S Alexandri M 6\textsuperscript{th} S. And, Cors. E 7\textsuperscript{th} S. Felicis Mart 8\textsuperscript{th} S. Luciani Mar 9\textsuperscript{th} Ss. Cel Jul Mr 10\textsuperscript{th} S. Albinae Mar 11\textsuperscript{th} B. Tomae a Co 12\textsuperscript{th} S. Joannis Ep 13\textsuperscript{th} S. Hilarii ED 14\textsuperscript{th} B. Bernar Cor 15\textsuperscript{th} S. Pauli pr Er 16\textsuperscript{th} S. Adiuti Mart 17\textsuperscript{th} S. Antonii Ab 18\textsuperscript{th} S. Pontiani M 19\textsuperscript{th} S. Marthae Mar 20\textsuperscript{th} Ss. Fab. Seb. M 21\textsuperscript{st} S. Agnetis VM 22\textsuperscript{nd} Ss. Vinc. An. M 23\textsuperscript{rd} S. Agathang M 24\textsuperscript{th} S. Eugenii Mar 25\textsuperscript{th} S. Ananiae Mar 26\textsuperscript{th} S. Paulae Vid 27\textsuperscript{th} S. Jo Chrys. ED 28\textsuperscript{th} S. Angel. Me. V 29\textsuperscript{th} S. Fran Sal Ep 30\textsuperscript{th} S. Felicis I Pp 31\textsuperscript{st} B. Ludov Alb

\textbf{February 2\textsuperscript{nd}} B. Nicola Lon 3\textsuperscript{rd} S. Blasii EpM 4\textsuperscript{th} S. Josep a Leo 5\textsuperscript{th} S. Agathaie VM 6\textsuperscript{th} S. Hyac Mar V 7\textsuperscript{th} S. Richardi Reg 8\textsuperscript{th} S. Scholast Vr 9\textsuperscript{th} S. Apollon VM 10\textsuperscript{th} S. Severini Ab 11\textsuperscript{th} BB 7 Fun SM 12\textsuperscript{th} S. Gaudentii E 13\textsuperscript{th} S Cath Ri Vr 14\textsuperscript{th} S. Eleucadii Ep 15\textsuperscript{th} S. Lucii Marty 16\textsuperscript{th} S. Castuli Mar 17\textsuperscript{th} S. Faustini Mr 18\textsuperscript{th} S. Flaviana Ep 19\textsuperscript{th} S. Germani Mr 20\textsuperscript{th} S. Nemesii Mr 21\textsuperscript{st} S. Fortunati M 22\textsuperscript{nd} S. Margar Cor 23\textsuperscript{rd} S. Pet Dam ED 24\textsuperscript{th} S Mathiae Apo 25\textsuperscript{th} S. Victorini Mr. 26\textsuperscript{th} S Diodori Mar

\textsuperscript{3} As the church’s roster of saints expands designated feasts shift to make room for newcomers. Research indicates that the person who created this “tapestry” of feasts may have followed the order provided in \textit{The Saints: A Concise Biographical Dictionary}, John Coulson (ed), Guild Press, Inc. 1958.
27th S. Donati Mart 28th S. Theophili M 7s S. Romual Ab 9s S. Rainaldi Ep 14b S. J Ba a Con


“H-2”Second relic “tapestry” top line:
S. Zachar Pat
S. Joseph Spn
Domus Laur
S. Joann Bapt
S. Elisab Mat

Second relic “tapestry” second line:
Julius
1st S. Serenae Mar

Augustus
1st S. Steph I PM

September
1st Constantii E

October
1st Greg Arm E
November
1st Caesarei DM

December
1st Candidae Mr

Following – the complete listing for each of the second six months of the year:


Corridor of Saints “I” Framed Display (Dimensions: 6 x 6 inches top frame short wall)

❖ S. Eutropia
❖ S. Modestini
❖ S. Jugond
❖ S. _____auste M.
❖ S. Innocent & (center) bone of S. Jubin

Corridor of Saints “J” Framed Display (Dimensions: 10 x 12 inches bottom frame short wall)

❖ S. Francis de Sales Founder
❖ S. Jane Frances de Chantal Founder (and clockwise)
  St. Clare V., SS & Martyrs, S. Crescentia, S. Clement, S. Polycarp, S. Clare VM, S. MM Alocouque
❖ S. Victor
❖ S. Simon Stals
❖ SS. and Martyrs
❖ St. Boniface
❖ S. Vincent
❖ S. Benedict
❖ S. Ignatius SJ
❖ S. Cecilia

Central display (clockwise):
❖ S. Francis de Sales
❖ Voile de la Vierge
❖ S. Jane de Chantal
❖ S. Severe
❖ S. Francis Regis
❖ S. Victor
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION &amp; CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cathedral Sacristy “A”</td>
<td>Relic from an Olive Tree in the Garden of Gethsemane, site of Our Lord’s prayer prior to the crucifixion. Brought to St. Raphael Cathedral by Mrs. L. Donilan 1888 (framed by Brownstone Gallery &amp; Frame, Dubuque IA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedral Rectory “B”</td>
<td>S. Andreæ Apostle (early first century to mid to late first century) St. Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedral Rectory “B”</td>
<td>S. Maria Goretti (October 16, 1890-July 6, 1902) Virgin and Martyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedral Rectory “B”</td>
<td>S. Catherine Laboure (Daughter of Charity/Originator of the Miraculous Medal) Virgin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>