What are Relics?

A relic is an object that is considered holy or sacred because it is associated with a saint or a significant event in the life of Jesus or the early Church. The term "relics of the Saints" primarily refers to the bodies or notable parts of the bodies of the Saints who, as distinguished members of Christ's mystical Body and as Temples of the Holy Spirit, now dwell in Heaven but once lived on earth.

Objects that belonged to the Saints, such as personal items, clothing, and manuscripts, are also considered relics, as well as objects that have touched their bodies or tombs, such as oils, cloths, and images. They are usually broken down into three classes:

1st **First class relics** are the body or fragments of the body of a saint, such as pieces of bone, flesh, or hair.

Hair of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Bones of St. Peter

Bones of St. Mary Magdalene

Bones of St. Peregrine

Blood-soaked bandage of St. Padre Pio

2nd **Second class relics** are something that a saint personally owned, such as a shirt or book (or fragments of those items).

Cincture of St. John Paul II

Clothing of St. Katharine Drexel

Veil of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Clothing of St. Anthony of Padua

Wood of the True Cross of Christ

3rd **Third class relics** are those items that a saint touched or that have been touched to a first, second, or another third class relic of a saint. **With regard to third class relics, the touch does not have to be a direct touch to the relic itself. Merely touching the container that houses the relic is sufficient to bring about that transformation and effect a new relic.*

Venerating Relics

When venerating a relic, one can show respect and reverence by performing acts such as genuflecting, bowing, or kissing the relic. These acts are not meant to worship the relic, but to express reverence and honor for the saint. By venerating relics, we hope to share in the holiness of the saints.

Becoming A Saint

All Christians are called to be saints. Saints are persons in heaven (officially canonized or not), who lived heroically virtuous lives, offered their life for others, or were martyred for the faith, and who are worthy of imitation.

In official Church procedures there are three steps to sainthood: a candidate becomes "Venerable," then "Blessed" and then "Saint." Venerable is the title given to a deceased person recognized formally by the pope as having lived a heroically virtuous life or offered their life for Christ. To be beatified and recognized as a Blessed, one miracle acquired through the candidate's intercession is required in addition to recognition of heroic virtue or offering of life. Canonization requires a second miracle after beatification. The pope may waive these requirements. A miracle is not required prior to a martyr's beatification, but one is required before canonization.

1. **Servant of God** – the title given to a candidate for sainthood whose cause is still under investigation, prior to being declared Venerable.

2. **Venerable** – the title given to a candidate for sainthood whose cause has not yet reached the beatification stage but whose heroic virtue has been declared by the pope.

3. **Blessed** – title bestowed on a person who has been beatified and accorded limited liturgical veneration.

4. **Saint** – the title given to someone who has been formally canonized by the Church as sharing eternal life with God, and therefore offered for public veneration and imitation.[1]

Relics in Scriptures

Scripture teaches that God acts through relics, especially in terms of healing. In fact, when surveying what Scripture has to say about sacred relics, one is left with the idea that healing is what relics "do."

- *When the corpse of a man was touched to the bones of the prophet Elisha the man came back to life and rose to his feet* ***(2 Kings 13:20-21).*** *In fact, we are told that after his death, Elisha's bones prophesied* ***(Sirach 48:13-14).***

- *A woman was healed of her hemorrhage simply by touching the hem of Jesus' cloak* ***(Matthew 9:20-22);*** *and Mark informs us that as many as touched it were healed* ***(Mark 6:56).***

- *The signs and wonders worked by the Apostles were so great that people would line the streets with the sick so that when Peter walked by at least his shadow might 'touch' them* ***(Acts 5:12-15).*** *In other words, even Peter's shadow was healing.*

- *When handkerchiefs or aprons that had been touched to Paul were applied to the sick, the people were healed and evil spirits were driven out of them* ***(Acts 19:11-12).***

In each of these instances God has brought about a healing using a material object. The vehicle for the healing was the touching of that object. It is very important to note, however, ***that the cause of the healing is God***; ***the relics are a means through which He acts.*** In other words, relics are not magic. They do not contain a power that is their own; a power separate from God. Any good that comes about through a relic is God's doing. The fact that God chooses to use the relics of saints to work healing and miracles tells us that He wants to draw our attention to the saints as *"models and intercessors"* (CCC #828). It also reveals His intention to use relics to foreshadow the general resurrection of mankind: that one day God's faithful children, the members of His Body, will reign with him in glory, and through whom, even now on earth, He works mightily.[2]

1 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (n.d.). Canonization of Saints. USCCB. Retrieved October 18, 2024, from https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints

2 Treasures of the Church. (n.d.). About relics. Treasures of the Church. Retrieved October 18, 2024, from https://treasuresofthechurch.com/about-relics/