

# **ALL SAINTS' DAY and the VENERATION OF RELICS**

As we approach All Saints' Day next week and witness once again the beautiful collection of Saint relics in front of the Altar of Sacrifice, we take this opportunity to learn why the veneration of relics is important and part of our devotional life as Catholics.

## **What is a Saint? Who can be one?**

In the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, "saints are only sinners who keep trying." Since we are all called to live lives of holiness in this world, each one of us has the potential to become a saint. The Saints we celebrate and learn about on certain days throughout the Church year, though, are those individuals whom the Church has named through a formal process of examining their lives of authentic witness to Jesus Christ. Many saints by name are celebrated on the Church calendar, and yet many more exist that we do not know by name. This is why the Church celebrates All Saints' Day!

## **What are Relics?**

"Relics consist of such things as bodily remains of saints, articles of clothing or other possessions of a saint, the instruments used in the torture and death of a martyr, or the instruments of Christ's Passion (like the True Cross). A relic can also be an otherwise common object which has come into physical contact with a relic," an example of which would be an "icon which has been placed on the bones of a saint."

*Holy Relics: The Scriptural and Historical Basis for the Veneration of Relics of the Saints*, T.L. Frazier, pp. 5-6.

## **Why are bodily remains used as relics?**

The Church teaches us that "the salvation wrought by Christ is a transformation of the whole person, both body and soul." Thus, our view "toward bodily relics reflects our belief in how we are saved." God's "saving grace works in the body as well as the soul of the Christian." Relics are not only physical evidence that a particular saint lived, but also a way by which God's grace can be conveyed. "The bodily relics of the saints are grace-filled and holy" since "the grace of God does not depart from us at death. By venerating the bodily relics of the saints, we hope to somehow participate in the grace they have received."

*Holy Relics: The Scriptural and Historical Basis for the Veneration of Relics of the Saints*, T.L. Frazier, pp. 16-17.

## **Why do we venerate the Saints in this way?**

It is easy to confuse venerating, i.e. placing high value on, someone or something, with the worship due to God alone. Our veneration of the saints is not a form of worship; but rather, gestures of honor, reverence, and respect for the authentic witness to Christ their lives can inspire in us. Because saints can intercede for us, our prayers to them are similar to asking another human being to pray for us to God.

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## How do we properly venerate a relic?

Many ways exist for giving due honor to authentic relics: a bow of the head; genuflecting in front of it; kissing the relic; or simply touching it. Saint relics are also placed in an altar stone and sealed inside each Altar of Sacrifice in every Catholic church, referring to historic moments in the early Church when Christ's sacrifice in the Mass was celebrated over the graves of saints and martyrs. Because the Altar is where the sacrifice takes place in each Mass, with relics of saints underneath each, clergy, lectors and psalmists bow in reverence to Christ in the Altar as each moves about the sanctuary and to/from the Ambo to proclaim the Word of God. The relics of Sts. Vigilans and Eulogius are sealed in the Altar of Sacrifice here at St. Matthew.

After every Mass celebrating All Saints' Day, consider checking out the relics as they are displayed in front of the Altar of Sacrifice. As the Church year and calendar brings us individual saint celebrations, may we be reminded of, and inspired by, their witness to Christ, recalling that their feast days are placed on the calendar by when they died for their Faith in Him, which is to say: their birth into eternal life with God.

All holy men and women, Saints of God, pray for us!

