

## Veneration of Saints and their Relics

### Who are the Saints?

A saint is a disciple of Jesus Christ, who lived a life of extraordinary fidelity to the Lord. Saints are people who in this life were so united to Jesus Christ that with His help they strove to do the will of the Father in everything, devoting themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Saints give us shining examples of all the virtues, including: faith, hope, and love both of God every human being; prudence (or practical wisdom), justice, fortitude (or courage), and temperance (or self-mastery); detachment, purity, and obedience; humility, simplicity, and magnanimity. Each saint is noteworthy for certain particular virtues. For this reason, the church proposes them to its members as friends and companions in the following of Christ, as models to imitate, and as intercessors with God.

### What is a Relic?

A relic is something connecting with a saint or blessed, including a part of their body (example: hair or a piece of bones), their clothing, or an object that the person used or touched. Relics are classified:

1<sup>st</sup> class Relic- a part of the person's body, for example: blood, hair, and bones:

2<sup>nd</sup> class relic- an article touched by the person or touched directly to part of his or her body:

3<sup>rd</sup> class Relic- something touched indirectly to the person, in other words, something touched to a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> class relic, to the tombs or reliquary, etc.

It is not the kind of relic or how big it is that is important, but rather the faith and prayer that the relic occasions. By the communion of saints, it is that person who is close to us, blessing and praying for us.

### Why do we Venerate Relics?

The veneration of relics is an ancient custom dating from the reverence shown at the graves of the martyrs even in the time of the apostles. In the year 156 the inhabitants of Smyrna wrote a letter describing the death of St. Polycarp, their bishop. After he had been burned at the stakes his faithful disciples wished to carry off his remains, but the Jews urged the Romans officer to refuse his consent for fear that the Christians "would only abandon the Crucified One and begin to worship this man." The smyrnians explained, " We took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom."

Miracles have been worked by God in association with relics - the women cured of a hemorrhage by touching the hem of Christ's cloak (Matthew 3:20-22), the sick who were healed when Peter's shadow passed over them (Acts 5:14-16), and God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." (Acts 19:11-12). It is not that some magical power existed in them, but just as God's work was done through the lives of [holy people], so did His work continue after their deaths. Likewise, just as [others] were drawn closer to God through the lives of [holy people], so did they (even if through their remains) inspire others to draw closer after their deaths.

In all, relics remind us of the holiness of a saint and his cooperation in God's work; at the same time, relics inspire us to ask for the prayers of the saints and to beg the grace of God to live the same kind a faith-filled life.

What Do We Express When We Venerate Relics?

To venerate the relics of the saints is a profession of belief in several doctrines of the Catholics Faith:

1. The belief in everlasting life for those who have obediently witnessed to Christ and His Holy Gospel here on earth;
2. The truth of the resurrection of the body for all persons on the last day;
3. The doctrine of the splendour of the human body and the respect which all should show toward the bodies of both the living and the deceased;
4. The beliefs in the special intercessory power which the saints enjoy in heaven because of their intimate relationship with Christ the King; and
5. The truth of our closeness to the saints because of our connection in the communion of saints-we as members of the Church militant or pilgrim Church, they as members of the church triumphant.