

Pastor hopes display of holy relics will inspire faith

written by Alesia Schaefer |



One way to keep the saints alive is to study their holy relics.

As younger members of the faithful are less acquainted with the veneration of relics, Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Springdale is hosting a Mass and veneration of relics to enrich faith life and devotion to the saints.

It may come as a surprise to know the newest parish in the diocese has more than 72 first-and second-class relics of the saints. Relics from Our Lady of Fatima and Sts. Padre Pio, Monica, Anthony of Padua, John Vianney, Edmund Campion and Robert Bellarmine, as well as relics from lesser known saints such as the Japanese Martyrs all make up the collection. Even more interesting, more than 26 of them are from the personal collection of pastor Father Joshua Passo, FSSP.

“The more you know about the saint,” Father Passo said, “the more faith and devotion you have. A relic can bring blessing to the faithful. The more one learns about the lives of the saint, that enlivens the relic and the life of the saint and that helps the relics come back to life.”

Father Passo, of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, has served as pastor of the newly formed Latin Mass congregation since January 2020.

In that time, the idea formed to celebrate a Mass of Veneration for the Holy Relics. The idea came to fruition on the day that for centuries has been the feast day to celebrate relics, Nov. 5. Approximately 100 congregants came together for a votive Mass where Father Passo preached

on relics and following Mass, parishioners had a chance to venerate relics spread across four tables.

Father Passo, a native of Omaha, Neb., recalls receiving his very first relic as a birthday gift in 2002.

"I remember a friend of the family gifting me with a relic of St. John Vianney, whom I had chosen as my confirmation saint," he said. "I was touched by the gift and not knowing much about relics, it prompted me to learn more and seek to deepen my understanding of the saint."

As Father Passo grew and discerned his vocation to the priesthood, he said he began to develop a deeper devotion to relics and began to receive more as personal gifts.

His favorite relic is associated with Our Lady of Fatima, due in part because it is actually three relics in one. It contains a piece of the coffins from two of the children, Jacinta and Francisco, that Our Lady appeared before and a piece of the tree that Mary stood on. Father Passo said he received this relic from a woman in Florida who was a sacristan in a church that was closing.

"To more fully understand relics, there are different degrees or classes of relics," Father Passo said. "A first-class relic is one that is from the body of a saint, such as bone, blood or flesh. A second-class relic is one that is a possession of a saint or an item that the saint has touched, such as clothing or a habit."

Although there is no shrine set up in the church, Father Passo regularly rotates the display of four relics on the altar monthly so that parishioners have a chance to view different ones. Those that are not on display are kept in a safe, and a few are displayed on his home altar in the rectory.

All but two of the relics are displayed in reliquaries.

Over the past two years, several priests who are friends of the Latin Mass community have given the majority of the relics to the new parish.

The practice of venerating relics is not as widespread as it once was. Some parishes do not possess relics or even hold the relics in as high esteem as they once did.

"Most relics are only brought out for different feast days or ceremonies within a parish," Father Passo said.

The veneration of relics can be compared to having a devotion to the rosary or Divine Mercy. By learning more about the life of the saint and reflecting on their holiness, Catholics can learn to emulate the saints' dedication to God.

Scripture also speaks of the veneration of relics in numerous passages, according to Father Passo. "The very shadow of St. Peter healed people (Acts 5:12-16), the hem of Jesus' garment healed a woman (Luke 8:43-48). When the prophet Elisha died and was buried, a man that had died was thrown in the grave of Elisha and the man came back to life (2 Kings: 20-21).

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Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, situated on 10 acres, has grown from 180 parishioners in 2020 to more than 400 in the past two years. In July, associate pastor Father Edgar Ramirez, FSSP, was also assigned to the parish.