

International Crusade for Holy Relics

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GUARDIANSHIP OF RELICS

A MIXED BLESSING

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What a Blessing!

For those individuals who “possess” sacred and holy relics of the saints, the awe and joy can be almost intoxicating. To think – we can have fragments of the precious bodies of saints (first class relics) or items that they contacted when they were alive (second class relics) in our homes! What a tremendous blessing. However, this blessing carries with it enormous responsibilities for the “guardians” of relics.

Nature of a Guardian

A guardian of a relic is a caretaker or steward. He (or she) does not own the relic; he has been entrusted with its safekeeping and veneration for the time during which he is the guardian, usually his lifetime.

Acquisition of Relics

Guardians can obtain relics in various ways. He can sometimes acquire them from official sources, such as convents, monasteries, and shrines. However, because of the abuses that are rampant today (such as the auctioning of relics on the Internet), this is becoming (correctly, but also unfortunately) much less frequent. A relic may be a gift from a priest, relative, or friend, or it might be inherited. Relics can be “rescued” by purchasing them, although there is some controversy regarding rescuing a relic. Guardians should, if possible, rescue a relic from convents that are closing, flea markets, garage sales, and estate sales. This will allow it to be retained for its proper purpose, veneration, rather than be profaned or mistreated by someone who does not realize or value its significance. Rescuing a relic from an antique store is often laudable, as these are usually just “picked up” along with other items by the proprietor. However, some antique shops specialize in relics and in religious and liturgical items, and rescuing a relic might stimulate the owner to obtain more. In general, it is not beneficial to bid on relics at auction, especially on the Internet, as this allows profiteering by the seller and stimulates further simony. However, prayer and conscience must be part of any decision, and rescuing relics by auction might be warranted in certain specific circumstances.

Veneration and Education

Relics are not baseball cards. A guardian must assiduously be “on guard” against the temptation to indiscriminately obtain as many relics as possible for his “collection”, as this is a form of materialism. In general, a guardian should restrict himself to relics of saints that have a

particular significance to him. It is also the solemn duty of the guardian to privately venerate every relic that he possesses, especially on the feast day of the saint. If the relic has an authentic (document), the guardian should, as much as is feasible, make it available for public veneration at a church or chapel – if not permanently, at least on the feast day. Some guardians may have very large collections of relics resulting from years of rescues, etc., and it may be impractical to promote public veneration of all of these relics in a single year. A rotating schedule over a number of years may work. Educating others about relics, formally (e.g., by giving talks with time reserved for public veneration) or on an individual basis, should be a mission. Finally, it is not appropriate to “horde” relics, as they are meant to build up the faithful in the Church. It would be best to transfer any multiples of relics to other guardians who desire a particular relic but lack it.

Protection of relics

The guardian must do his best to protect and preserve the relic. He should shield it from direct sunlight and attempt to minimize extreme temperatures and changes in humidity to prevent any damage or deterioration from occurring to the relic and its theca. It may also even be necessary to store the relics in a fireproof and burglarproof safe, especially if they will be left unattended for long periods, such as when the guardian is traveling. It must be remembered that these are precious and irreplaceable holy items, and they should be treated with the care and respect that they deserve.

Transfer of Guardianship

Relics have been freely distributed for at least a thousand years. Remembering that, “Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty, if we are strong” (*Ps 90:10*), what happens to relics when a guardian dies? Planning for this eventuality is a MOST IMPORTANT responsibility of a guardian. Relics gotten from estate sales are constantly being auctioned on the Internet. A guardian should make specific provisions in his Last Will and Testament for the transfer of relics to responsible individuals or organizations upon his death. If possible, the guardian should get a signed document from the designated beneficiary of the relic attesting that he is knowledgeable about the *cultus* of relics, will never sell the relic, and will require the same stipulations of anyone to whom he subsequently transfers the relic. This same procedure would ideally also be used when the guardian transfers a relic to someone else during his lifetime. If no trustworthy beneficiary is found, the guardian may designate that the relic be transferred to the bishop of the diocese or to ICHRusa upon his death.

Conclusions

Being the guardian of sacred and holy relics is an incredible blessing. However, a guardian must be faithful in his responsibility to ensure that the relics are properly cared for, venerated, and transferred. In this way, the Communion of Saints is enhanced for the spiritual benefit of believers and the Church.