

International Crusade for Holy Relics USA

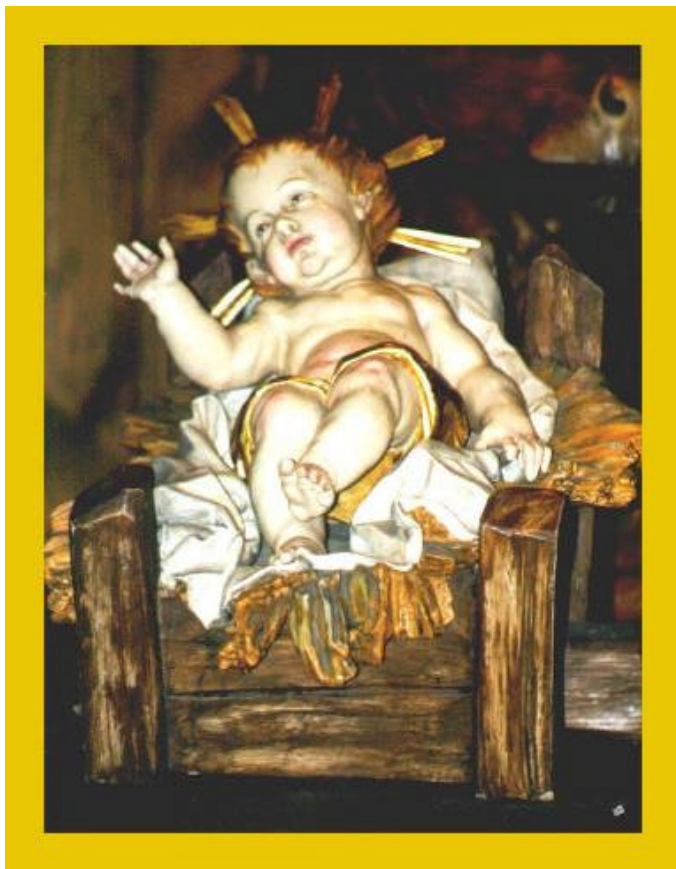


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Blessed Christmas!



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Special Points of Interest

- Official ICHRusa membership ring available (see page 5 for detailed picture)
- Visit ICHRusa's webpages at www.ichrusa.com

PIECES of the PAST

Display of religious relics opens

By Helen Gao, Staff Writer

DAILY NEWS Saturday, November 3, 2001

GLENDALE -- Inside an exquisite silver and gold box lined with purple velvet lies a transparent locket containing what is said to be a remnant of the veil once worn by

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the Blessed Virgin.

Displayed next to the box is a gold crucifix, with another locket embedded in it, holding a piece of what is purported to be the cross on which Jesus died.

The two relics are part of a display of 250 religious artifacts that opens today at Glendale Forest Lawn Museum, 1712 S. Glendale Ave. "Manger to Martyr: Veneration of Relics" is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily through Jan. 27.

Thomas J. Serafin of Glendale loaned his collection of relics to the museum in the hope that it will revive the veneration of saints and relics and build faith.

"What is happening straight across the board is we are starting to become more aware that we are losing tradition," said Serafin, a professional photographer and devout Catholic.

"If you don't have a past, you cannot constantly change without holding on to anything."

Serafin concedes that some visitors may question the authenticity of his relics, but he believes their meaning is a matter of individual faith.

"Whether a piece of garment is the actual garment is not the point," he said. "It's whether you can maintain your faith through mementos."

In the exhibit, some of the relics are paired beautifully with century-old stained-glass windows depicting the images of saints.

"You are not just looking at the relics, but it's telling you a story, too," said Margaret Burton, museum director and exhibit curator.

Notable relics on display include three black nails that are said to have been made with filings from the nails used during the Crucifixion; bits of the manger

fully illustrated with the (stained-glass) windows," said Msgr. Francis Weber, director of the San Fernando Mission, which has a relic collection of its own.

Charles Herrmann found himself overwhelmed. "It almost makes you feel holy being in here with all these relics," he said.

One display case is devoted to early Christian martyrs who were fed to wild animals, roasted alive or decapitated because of their refusal to give up their Christian faith.

"I feel like I am being surrounded by angels -- people who had one time lived and are so strong and do not mind pain or suffering for their beliefs," said Leonora Bouzas, who works as a cashier at the cemetery and has relics of her own.

Serafin said his passion for relics began about 10 years ago when he set out to

find a relic of St. Alphonsus Liguori, whose work greatly impressed him.

"When I started to search one out -- although everyone was telling me how extremely valuable they were -- they were not being venerated in the United States," he said.

Through gifts and trades with other collectors, Serafin now has 1,200 religious relics. He also founded an educational

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where Christ was born; a piece of the cloak once worn by Joseph, Mary's husband; and a rock from where archaeologists said Noah's Ark stood for years.

Guests, both laymen and members of the clergy, who were invited to a special opening reception Thursday night were impressed by the exhibit.

"This is the finest of this kind of exhibit I have ever seen. It's so beauti-

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Web site called Saints Alive and the International Crusade for Holy Relics, which monitors the trading of relics on the Internet.

Serafin said many of his relics come with documents of authenticity issued by the Roman Catholic Church. Locketts that hold authentic relics, he said, carry a special red wax seal with a thread running through it to guarantee that the contents are untouched.

Because most of the original containers have been melted down by those who want the precious metals and jewels, Serafin has designed many reliquaries for his collection.

In recognition of his work, Serafin was knighted by the Order of the Immaculate Conception of Vila Vicosa in Portugal. The robe he wore for the ceremony is part of the exhibit, as well as a note from the late humanitarian, Mother Teresa, to him commending his work.

While his relic collection might be centuries old, Serafin said relics remain relevant today. An especially poignant example of a modern-day relic, he noted, is a policeman's badge that President George W. Bush held up during a speech to the nation after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"That is a relic," he said. "He is carrying a relic from a dead hero. Relics are about honoring people who have gone before us."

Physically Connecting with Faith

Relics bring Christians into contact with saints of the past.

Glendale News - Press

November 9, 2001



By Marshall Allen

GLENDALÉ -- Holy relics have been venerated throughout church history, but there have been misunderstandings about their power and authenticity. Now, relics belonging to Tom Serafin are on display at Forest Lawn Memorial Museum in Glendale.

The collection features hundreds of relics, including a tooth of Joseph of Ari-

mathea and a piece of the cross on which Christ was crucified. It's on display until Jan. 27, 2002.

Serafin, a studio photographer in Los Angeles, has been acquiring relics for more than 10 years and has more than 1,200 in his collection -- all of them authenticated by the Vatican. His organization, Saints Alive, is dedicated to the preservation and public veneration of authentically documented relics. Relics are "mementos of people who stayed the course -- people who accepted martyrdom, people who would rather be put to death than give up Christ," Serafin said. They come in three classes:

- * 1st Class: The bodies of saintly persons or any of their integral parts, such as limbs, ashes and bones.
- * 2nd Class: Objects that have come in physical contact with living saints and are thereby sanctified.
- * 3rd Class: Bits of cloth that have been touched by an actual 1st or 2nd class relic.

There's no intrinsic power in the relics themselves, Serafin said. A relic is not a talisman. He pointed to a story of Jesus, found in Mark 5, as an example. Jesus was walking through a crowd when a woman who had suffered from years of bleeding touched his cloak, hoping to be healed by the garment.

She was healed, but not because of the cloak. "Daughter, your faith has healed you," Jesus said to her.

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As for the veneration of relics, Serafin said some people mistake veneration for worship. But "worship is meant for God," Serafin said. Venerating an object means to give respect to it because it belonged to someone special, he said.

"If your dad had a big, old, soft sweater he used to wear when watching TV on the sofa, and he passed away, you sure wouldn't cut it up and go wax the car," Serafin said.

The saints, who were normal people noted for their devotion to God, give believers hope as they struggle through life. Their relics are evidence of the continuity of Christian people, past, present and future -- what the historic creeds call the communion of saints, according to Saints Alive literature.

The proof of a relic's authenticity would make skeptics cringe because it comes down to church tradition and faith. The church authenticates relics, providing a document that says where the relic is from, its class, and who conferred and authenticated it.

Just like the story of Jesus with the bleeding woman, authenticity also comes down to faith. Saints Alive literature says the historical authentication of relics is not about proof or science, but about passion:

"The passion that you have for the lives and legends of the saints is the most important evidence to their validity."

Relics of Christmastide

During the Christmas season, we commonly exchange gifts, but one must not forget the greatest gift of all... the Incarnate Word, Who in turn gives us the gift to be called sons and daughters of God! To keep our minds and hearts focused on this, Our Lord has allowed certain mementos connected with that miraculous event to pass to our generation

for the most part unscathed by time, infidels, and even incredulity. At the center of this blessed season is the Holy Relic of the Manger. "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger..." (Luke 2:7).

St. Helena first converted the grotto at Bethlehem into a chapel and adorned it with costly marble and other precious ornaments. The first basilica erected over the crypt is due most probably to the devotion and munificence of her son Constantine, of whom Eusebius says that "The emperor himself, eclipsing even the magnificence of his mother's design, adorned the same place in a truly regal style" (Vita Const., III, 43). The relics of the crib that are preserved at St. Mary Major's in Rome were probably brought there

from the Holy Land during the pontificate of Pope Theodore I (640-649), who was himself a native of Palestine, and who was well aware of the dangers of plunder and pillage to which they were exposed at the hands of the Mussulmans and other marauders. We find at all events that the basilica erected by Liberius on the Esquiline first received the name of *Sancta Maria ad Praesepe* under Pope Theodore. During the pontificate of Hadrian I the first altar was erected in the basilica, and in the course of succeeding centuries the place where the relics are preserved came to be visited by the devout faithful from all parts of the Christian world. At the present time the remains of the crib preserved at St. Mary Major's consist of five pieces



Reliquary of the Holy Manger

of board which, as a result of the investigation conducted by Father Lais, sub-director of the Vatican Observatory, during the restorations of 1893 were found to be taken from a sycamore tree of which there are several varieties in the Holy Land. Two of the pieces, which like the other three, must have been originally much longer than they are at present, stood upright in the form of an X, upon which three other pieces rested, supported by a sixth piece, which, however, is missing, placed across the base of the upper angle of the X. We may conclude from this that these pieces of wood were properly speaking mere supports for the manger itself, which was probably made from the soft limestone of which the cave

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was formed. The rich reliquary, adorned with bas-reliefs and statuettes, which at present contains the relics of the crib was presented by the Duchess of Villa Hermosa in 1830. Pope Pius IV(1559-65) restored the high altar upon which the relics are solemnly



Reliquary of the Magi

exposed for the veneration of the faithful yearly on the eve of Christmas. (*The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume IV* – <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04488c.htm>)

“...And on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). The relics of the three Magi are held at the cathedral of Cologne. "The magi were the ones who gave gifts to the Lord. The first is said to have been Melchior, an old man with white hair and a long beard... who offered gold to the Lord as to a king. The second, Gaspar by name, young and beardless and ruddy complexioned. . . honored Him as God by his gift of incense, an oblation worthy of divinity. The third, black-skinned and heavily bearded, named Balthasar. . . by his gift of myrrh testified to the Son of Man who was to die" (*Excerpta et Collectanea* attributed to St. Bede (d. 735).

The relics, it is said, were discovered in Persia, brought to Constantinople by St. Helena, transferred to Milan in the fifth century and to Cologne in 1163 (Acta SS., I, 323).

The ICHRusa Prayer Group is attached to the Monastery of Fr. Symeon (ICHR member)

The next issue of “The Guardian” will be in March.

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Have a blessed New Year!

