

# The mysterious world of relics

By Douglas Belkin, Palm Beach Religion Staff Writer

Friday, November 19, 1999

The Internet "is like the Wild West," said Thomas Serafin, a Californian author, collector and international expert on relics and reliquaries (the often ornate cases that hold the relics.) "Anything goes." Serafin is on a crusade to bring the sacredness back to an "industry" that is increasingly pocked by skullduggery." If Internet sales continue, eventually you'll have some nut cutting up chicken bones and putting them up for sale."

During the Middle Ages, as relics became more and more popular, pressure increased for churches to have relics of high-profile saints on their premises, Serafin said. Having a relic from a famous saint would bring people from miles around to pray and tithe at the church. The process of authentication starts about the same time the multi-step canonization process begins. The body is exhumed and under supervision of the religious order to which the venerated person belonged, pieces of bone, hair, even the clothes the deceased was wearing and the burial coffin are removed. Once taken, the pieces are placed in packages and closed with a wax seal. If the seal is broken, it is very difficult to reauthenticate a relic, Serafin said.

(copy extracted from larger article)

# Bones of Contention

## Body parts of the saints are no longer relics of the past

*by Colleen O'Connor*

"People will buy a relic at an online auction for \$125, then turn around and sell it to some poor Catholic for \$5,000," says Tom Serafin, a relics enthusiast who monitors what he calls "e-simony," or trafficking in relics through online auction houses. The item whose price was bid up to \$5,000 was a wood fragment allegedly from Jesus' True Cross.

Less prestigious relics command less stratospheric prices: \$76 for prayer card that has touched a relic of St. Thérèse, for example, or a reliquary containing effects of St. Catherine Labouré that goes on the block at eBay for \$5.99 and is quickly bid up to \$150.

A less controversial manifestation of the current relics mania is the International Crusade for Holy Relics, which Serafin helped found a few years ago and which aims to revive the veneration of relics through exhibits and conferences. Its website allows the devout to venerate a range of relics online, from the bones of St. Candidus, a 3rd-century martyr, to a vial containing the blood of St. Teresa of Avila, a Spanish mystic who died in 1582.

(copy extracted from larger article)

## **A new form of illicit Web commerce - *e simony*.**

**The internet has become a major place for the sinful,  
but legal, buying and selling of sacred objects.**

***By Roy Maynard, Our Sunday Visitor***

**November 14, 1999**

It sounds positively medieval - relics, the actual bones of saints, as well as objects they touched in life - are being offered for sale to the faithful, at often astronomical prices. But there's a modern twist: The relics are being sold on the Internet.

"This is frightening," relic expert Tom Serafin said of this high-tech commission of an old style sin. "When I first noticed it on a privately run website, I tried to educate the individuals on Canon Law, but I met a lot of resistance, I knew it was only a matter of time before an electronic Dark Ages II would begin."

What Serafin calls "e-simony" - trafficking relics through Internet auction houses - has been going on for a little over a year, he said; now, relics some of the hottest items auctioned on Internet sites. ..."The problem is, people keep finding ways around the rules," Serafin said.

For example, last month a first-class relic of St.Pius X went for \$197.50 - or to be more exact, "the reliquary is being auctioned," the seller advertised.

"That's moronic," said Serafin. "It is a violation of Canon Law, of natural law, and it's a sin. The seller is putting his own soul at risk."

... Serafin said he's horrified. " The True Cross is the instrument of Jesus' passion," he said," and it's being bought and sold for profit."

(copy extracted from larger article)

(Translated from French)

## **Hide this saint that you would not know how to sell**

**An American Catholic group makes hunt to the merchants of relics on the Clean.**

*By EMMANUELLE RICHARD*

**Wednesday March 21, 2001 Liberation Newspaper - France**

Nestled of the Mass in a residential district of San Marino (agglomeration of Los Angeles). Some parishioners extract their bag cookies and Thermos of coffee, for a post - liturgical animation of an unaccustomed kind, a Catholic relic presentation. Of the small tips of bone, flesh or hairs having belonged supposedly to saints, pulled from the claws of sites web that sold these objects at the an auction. Him «savior» has for name international Crusade for holy relics (ICHR). The founder, Thomas Serafin, a big bearded to the predestined name and to the airs of Vittorio Gassman, present to the families intrigued a fragment of the skull of Gereon saint in a case made of silver. At every instant, he presents, about twenty relics as these («first class» containing human remains) are on sale on the Internet, often by Americans, in violation of the canonical law, «One would believe itself incomes in the Middle Ages, at the age of gold of the traffic of relics!», exclaim Serafin.

Preserved traditionally in the crypts of the cathedrals, the bishoprics or the churches, the relics meet at individuals, having inherited a parent priest for example. And finish today on the Web, where the collectors pull themselves them: «The old shrines are more and more sought-after in France and to the United States», note Edmund Van Gilder, an American antiquarian installed in Provence that sold the score of relics on his/her/its French - yesterdays.com site. The purchasers don't necessarily have the devout soul: the groups Satanists or the fetishist bondage are himself they also thrown in the relic business.

The relics fallen into the hands of the cybermerchants of the temple, here is that makes bound Thomas Serafin. «I think that our crusade is as important as those led against the Saracens, the Moorish and the Moslem that destroyed the holy Empire in the past», writes this photographer of

passionate fashion of relics on the site of the ICHR ([www.ICHRusa.com](http://www.ICHRusa.com)) thrown under the name «SaintsAlive» has six years. A group of volunteers among the 200 members of the organization review with the fine-toothed comb the sites of auctions with a mission: to contact the sellers of relics by e-mail and to convince them that they are wrong. Sometimes a polite e-mail signed with a formula «In the joy of the cross» or «With you in the Christ» is sufficient: so a lady of Los Angeles who wanted to get rid «of family's oldie» accepted to interrupt a sale on eBay immediately. With a little luck, the person makes grant of the relic to the group.

But most sellers are not as very disposed. A merchant, who had announced on eBay «it is my last relic of the blessed Gennaro Sarnelli, MAKE A GOOD OFFER then!», retort to a member of the ICHR: «To sell some relics is not a sacrilege, it is a serious sin, what is not the same thing!» Another merchant: «We are on eBay, not in your parish. The canonical law only applies to the Catholics.» In manner of provocation, a seller put on sale «air breathed by Jesus» on eBay. If he comes up against a wall, Serafin contacts the sites of auctions directly. Amazon, he says, reacts very well: the employees learned to recognize the Latin enrollments on the objects «ex oss», an abbreviation that means «of the bones of» and interrupt the sales of relics. eBay on the other hand is less cooperative. «One begins to irritate them», confess Serafin. The Yahoo business in France gives him very desire to attack the site in justice to get the interdiction of the bids of relics.

«Freedom of speech». «If his/her demand is a question of canonical law or ecclesiastical preference, and don't rest on the American law, it won't go very far», esteem Michael Overing, lawyer and professor of cyberdroit to the school of Annenberg communication of the university of California of the South. According to him, Serafin has more luck while reminding to eBay that she forbids henceforth on his/her/its site the sales of parts of human bodies, including the bones. eBay declared that it studied the complaints to the case by case, without can guarantee the withdrawal of all relics. According to Alan Davidson, lawyer for the group non-profit Center Democracy heart Technology and, the protests of users incite the sites of bids to forbid more and more categories of objects, as the weapons, or the racist pamphlets. «When a site decides to block some sales on his/her/its own authority, it is very well, comment the lawyer. But it worries me when one wants that a law forces them to take such measures. It touches to relative questions to the freedom of speech, as in the Yahoo business that caused a lot of concern in the United States.»

«It is not the interpreters' deprived of the canonical law but to the church to decide if the sale of relics is not well either», esteem on his/her/its side the in line antiquarian Edmund Van Gilder. Vatican didn't express itself lately on the topic. Van Gilder says that he counts a lot of dioceses, of parishes and priests among his/her/its customers, anxious to withdraw the relics of the market to replace them in the churches. Some religious are irritated by the crusade of Serafin: «A nun called me cybernazi!», exclaim the photographer. He would like to take his 1,200 relics, on the road in the setting of a roving exhibition. «The relics are a little as the napkins of the stars of the rock, explain soeur Timothy Marie, a Carmelite arrival to admire the exhibition in the parish of San Marino. People want to be able to touch them.».

Feature article on [www.Salon.com](http://www.Salon.com)

## When the saints go up for auction

A one-man crusade against online relic sales is met with unholy indifference.

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By **Jeff Sypeck** Feb. 20, 2001

There's a story Thomas Serafin enjoys: During the Middle Ages, a traveling monk hoping to purchase a saint's relic for his monastery found little success and returned home disappointed. Luckily, he soon encountered a merchant who offered to sell him the skull of John the Baptist. The monk was dumbfounded. Hadn't he just seen the skull of St. John in a church during a recent visit to France? "That was the skull of St. John when he was a *child*," explained the merchant. "This is his skull when he was an adult."

To Serafin, a professional photographer and founder of the International Crusade for Holy Relics in Los Angeles, this little parable is a reminder that some things never change. Aided by some 200 members -- primarily Roman Catholics but also members of the Russian Orthodox, Byzantine and Anglican churches -- Serafin is on a mission to identify sellers of saints' relics and convince them of the error of their ways, or shut them down. But he's not roaming the lonely cloisters or muddy market squares of Europe; instead Serafin keeps a suspicious eye on the Internet's highly successful auction houses, which have revived the market for the earthly remains of saints -- and sparked a conflict between an ancient religious tradition and the free-market ideals of the Internet.

Relics challenge our sensibilities in a skeptical age, but the modern world hardly lacks grotesque secular equivalents: Think of screaming fans flailing to catch Elvis Presley's sweat-drenched hankie or Michael Jackson coveting the bones of the Elephant Man. Saints' relics occupy a decidedly more solemn tradition: They're venerated as reminders of Christian virtue, and miracles are believed to occur in their presence. First-class relics -- pieces of a saint's bone or flesh -- are the most sacred. Second-class relics -- objects a holy person wore or owned -- are also highly valued. (Items that have touched other relics are known as third-class relics and can be found in many church gift shops.)

Although relic veneration is as old as Christianity, abuse and fraud connected with relics peaked during the Middle Ages, prompting Chaucer to make his most memorably despicable "Canterbury Tales" character a corrupt preacher who hawks pigs' bones to gullible peasants. Later, an abiding interest in relics starkly separated Catholics from Protestants, and John Calvin railed venomously against them as evidence of corruption. In the 16th century, dozens of nails were said to be relics of Christ's crucifixion, more bones of Peter and Paul existed than either saint ever could have packed into his body and John the Baptist kept rearing his many problematic heads.

The modern canon law of the Roman Catholic Church strictly forbids the sale of first-class relics. But even though the law was reaffirmed as recently as 1983, relics still aren't the most popular subject among modern Catholics; to some clergy, they're unpleasant reminders of medieval superstitions and stereotypes. "I don't know anything at all about relics," sniffed one priest and canon lawyer in Washington. "I don't know anyone around here who would, either." In a modern church grappling with pressing social issues, it's even more rare to find anyone willing to blow the cobwebs of archaism off the concept of simony -- the sin of selling spiritual items and religious offices, named for New Testament heretic Simon Magus.

But electronic simony is on the rise; just ask Serafin, who sells his luridly titled report on the subject, "nEw JUDA\$: Electronic Simony Exposed," on the ICHR Web site. The report documents the organization's clashes with some of the online auction community's inveterate relic dealers. Like most Internet-based correspondence, the e-mail ranges from righteous and determined to petulant and crude. One grumpy relic seller mocks Serafin's knightly title "Chevalier," bestowed by the relic-friendly royalty of Portugal, as "French for the posterior of a horse." Others accuse the ICHR of entirely unwholesome motives. "Since you're so busy exploring the 'bad sins' of others," writes a relic dealer in response to an ICHR scolding, "just between you and me, buddy, what's YOUR 'bad sin'??? With most right-wing nut cases like you I've met, it's usually something NASTY that has to do with the 6th or 9th commandments. See you at Confession. You poor, sick thing."

But Serafin has a little fun with his adversaries, too. In the documents he releases, he mischievously replaces his foes' names with "SIMON," a cheeky jab with damning connotations. Some of the e-mails reproduced in "nEw JUDA\$" even bear witness to the justifications of relic-selling clergy: One

nun -- Serafin dubs her "SIMONITA" -- accurately points out that the Roman Catholic Church allows the sale of relics as long as it's clear that the container is for sale and the relic is a "gift." "It's a fine and Jesuitical quibble," she writes, "but if it's good enough for the Church, it's good enough for me!"

The ICHR has clearly dealt with a few sleazy hucksters. Last September, one of its most unrepentant opponents tried to sell "the air breathed by Jesus" on eBay. Serafin and his members were aghast, but the audacious auction was an obvious attempt to get a few cheap yuks and horrify ICHR's serious-minded crusaders. But not all online relic sellers resemble some slick Chaucerian caricature. Many are like the devout Catholic woman from China who simply wanted to get rid of a relic, unaware that her religion forbade its sale. "She thought owning it was 'spooky,'" Serafin explains. Others consider themselves religious and confidently assert their own interpretations of right and wrong. "I am a Catholic, but I do not blindly follow their dogmas," says Daniel Lopez Gonzalez of Puerto Rico, who recently sold "an old relic of the True Cross" on eBay for \$1,100. Gonzalez says that he buys far more relics for his own personal veneration than he ever sells, arguing that there's little difference between buying a relic from him and obtaining one legitimately from a religious order in exchange for a donation. "Whichever way you want to say it," he says, "a donation or contribution to the church -- any amount of money given in exchange for a relic -- is a sale."

"I have never sold a relic, just the reliquary," explains another dealer carefully. "The relic is always a gift." He points out that organizations like the ICHR are not officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church, and calls them "a bunch of renegades that just want to acquire relics for free."

Serafin and the ICHR "rescue" many relics by buying them, which isn't prohibited under church law. But their other options are severely limited. Whether laws pertaining to the sale of human remains apply to tiny chips of bone and flesh is still an open question, and legal remedies for relic theft are nearly nonexistent. In 1998, a Romanian thief who swiped a relic and other religious items from a French church was nabbed in Newark, N.J., and charged with a decidedly mundane crime: filing a false customs report. Fraud laws may cover the problem of fake relics -- but with deep and abiding faith riding on the answer, what prosecutor or judge would dare

confirm or deny the authenticity of saints' bones, or of a chip of wood supposedly from the manger of the infant Jesus?

At times, Serafin and the ICHR have persuaded online auction houses to close down some sales of first-class relics. Serafin has kind words for the staff of Amazon Auctions, where, he says, some staffers have even learned to recognize Latin phrases like *ex ossibus*, "from the bones of." "We don't have a policy that specifically prohibits the sale of first-class relics," explains Amazon Auctions spokeswoman Lizzie Allen, "but in the past we have removed relics that were reported to us. Also, human body parts are prohibited, therefore first-class relics will be prohibited in most cases."

Members of ICHR have also discussed the matter with lawyers for eBay. Although there's never a guarantee that a relic will be removed, "we do take it on a case-by-case basis," says eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove. "If a user brings a complaint to our attention and we can determine that a relic includes human remains, it may be removed." But as of early February, eBay was still a veritable online charnel house of holy bones -- from well-known figures like St. Valentine to the more obscure St. Alphonsus Liguori. "Getting eBay to do anything is impossible," complains a frustrated Serafin.

Ronald Green, director of the Institute for the Study of Applied and Professional Ethics at Dartmouth College, suggests that a viable business can only do so much to assuage the concerns of its religious customers: "At issue here, of course, is basic freedom of commerce and the rights of individuals to sell items whose sale others religiously object to. Surely we don't want to cater to every religious objection to the sale of things. Should we forbid the sale of meat because Jains object to the killing of animals? Alcohol because some groups oppose its use?" But Green concedes that online auction houses don't want to become the object of a Catholic boycott, and should be willing to work with offended religious customers if enough complaints suggest a serious problem.

It's unlikely that Catholics will unite in their outrage over relic selling anytime soon. The archdioceses of Washington and Los Angeles did not respond to calls about online relic sales, and it took a call to the Vatican to find a church official who would discuss the subject. **Monsignor Robert Sarno of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the Vatican office that gathers evidence for canonizations and works to preserve relics, was appalled to learn that simple containers with small relics were**

**selling on eBay for hundreds of dollars. "I'm disappointed that businesses would have such high disregard for people's religion by selling relics of deceased individuals proclaimed to be in heaven," he said from his office in Rome. "These are sacred objects." Sarno suggests that the Catholic Church's official involvement might only make the problem worse, and he commends the laypeople who are waging an unpopular crusade. But he concludes with a sigh: "I guess most people don't care."**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that an indifferent clergy may be pumping both supply and demand for relics. Michael, an art dealer from Germany who sells relics online, says he knows of a cardinal who regularly browses antiques shops to stock his personal collection. Other relic sellers on both sides of the Atlantic report tales of cash-strapped monks and nuns whose vows of poverty don't prevent them from dropping by pawnshops to make a few quick bucks. Serafin himself says he was even heckled by a nun during a recent speaking engagement. "When a nun calls you a cyber-Nazi, you know you're doing some good," he says, suggesting that his critics aren't seeing the larger picture.

"Listen," he says earnestly, "if we put the relics back in the box, we still have the lives of the saints -- reminders of how these people preserved their virtue, how they persevered." A relic, he explains, isn't just a dead piece of bone or flesh, but a reminder of the link between heaven and earth. "I think that's something most people can understand."

Interest in the saints themselves doesn't appear to be waning. In 1999, the relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a French nun who died in 1897, attracted crowds in the tens of thousands when they were displayed in American churches and shrines. And Pope John Paul II may soon make St. Isidore of Seville, a seventh century archbishop who compiled an early encyclopedia, the patron saint of the Internet.

Although the actual remains of saints are an unpopular subject, Serafin allows himself an optimistic laugh, remembering what a sympathetic priest recently told him. "If I can hang on around 300 years," he says, with no doubt in his voice, "they'll be back in fashion."

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# Keeping in Touch with the Saints

**Our Sunday Visitor**     September 6, 1998     By Ann Ball

Relics are often a forgotten sacramental. But Tom Serafin is doing his best to change that through the work of Saints Alive, an apostolate dedicated to the preservation and public veneration of authentically documented relics of the saints.

Based in Temple City, Calif., Saints Alive has a large collection of relics of individual saints, as well as relics of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. Serafin exhibits the collection in churches, retreat houses and religious communities, sometimes combining the exhibit with a day of recollection. The group, which comprises both lay people and Religious, hopes to help keep the saints alive in the hearts and minds of the faithful with its work.

In 1996, Saints Alive helped restore the collection of relics in the Los Angeles Archdiocesan Archival Center. They designed custom reliquaries, mounted and framed relics, and cataloged the complete collection, which is now on permanent public display. In early 1998, Serafin co-founded the International Crusade for Holy Relics, a pious organization of individuals and groups, both religious and secular, whose members use their own station in life to honor the lives, legends and the remains of the saints.

Serafin said that relics should not be considered as wonder-working talismans or good-luck charms. They are evidence of a world unseen, of the saints in heaven and of the continuity of Christian people of all times — a physical reminder of the Communion of Saints.

The word relic comes from the Latin *reliquiae*, meaning "the remains." Since early Christian times, the word has been used to refer to the bones of the saints or to their possessions.

"Real," or first-class, relics refer to a part of a saint's body, such as a fragment of bone, hair, blood or ash. Other relics, sometimes designated as second-class, are items worn or used by the saint. "Representative" relics are items that have been placed in contact with the body or grave of a saint by the piety of the faithful. Items such as rosaries and medals touched to a saint's relic and prayer cards containing a tiny piece of cloth that has been

touched to a relic are often distributed to the faithful by promoters of a cause.

The tradition of representative relics dates back to the fourth century, when objects touched to the bodies of the martyrs were known as *brandea*, and were enclosed in little cases worn about the necks of the faithful. The task of documenting the authenticity of relics is reserved to the Holy See, and those authorized by it to grant the certification.

Saints Alive has one of the largest collections of relics in the United States, with more than 800 documented relics. (Other large collections are found at St. Anthony's Chapel in Pittsburgh, Pa., and at the Shrine of the Holy Relics at Maria Stein, Ohio.) The Saints Alive collection includes such unique relics as a hair of St. Francis of Assisi, a vertebra of St. Joan Delanoue and the cap of St. Ubald of Gubbio.

### **A checkered history**

Veneration of the relics of Jesus, Mary and the saints dates to the beginnings of Christianity. During the Roman persecutions, Christians often had to flee for their lives, but frequently refused to leave their relics behind. In the Acts of St. Polycarp, written about A.D. 156, the saint's remains are described as being "more precious to us than the costliest diamonds, and which we esteem more highly than gold." The relics offered the early Christians hope of victory over pain, persecution and even death itself.

St. Ambrose relates how a blind man was restored to sight when the newly discovered bodies of Sts. Gervase and Protase were taken to the basilica. He added, "You know — nay, you have seen with your own eyes — how many were delivered from demons and a great number were cured of diseases when they touched the garments of the saints; how there was a repetition of the miracles of the early days when, in consequence of the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, abundant grace was showered down upon the earth." True veneration of relics causes the Christian to draw ever closer to Our Lord.

St. Augustine said, "We have not erected an altar to the martyr Stephen; but with the relics of the martyr Stephen, we have erected an altar to God." St. Jerome defended the cult of relics with an appeal to Scripture, ecclesiastical tradition and the miracles worked by God through the relics of the saint.

Beautiful reliquaries and churches were built to house relics. Small relics were placed in bishops' pectoral crosses and rings, and indulgences were offered for the practice of kissing them. Oaths were sworn on relics, and crusades were launched to rescue them from desecration.

Even today, collections of relics in museums and cathedrals throughout Europe draw large crowds. For the past 400 years, in memory of the first Masses held near the burial sites of the martyrs in the catacombs, relics were required to be placed in the *mensa*, a small space cut in the altar stone of the permanent altars of all Catholic churches.

Under the new rules quietly published in mid-1994, this requirement was deleted. It is recommended that relics be placed under, not in, the altar, and that they be large enough to be recognizable as parts of a human body.

The new rules did not affect the variety of practices followed by the Eastern Catholic rites, and the Vatican norms still allow for distribution of relics for use in the Byzantine rite's *antimension*, an altar cloth into which an envelope of relics are sewn.

The history of relics is checkered. At the time of the Crusades, many relics were brought to Europe from the Holy Land. Although some were genuine, many were fakes. During the 11th and 12th centuries, the sale of relics became a booming business. Superstitious practices that evolved around some relics, as well as the counterfeiting and sale of relics, were the basis of some of the complaints against the Church during the Reformation.

Church law deals stringently with these abuses. Relics are forbidden to be sold, and to fake a relic is to incur automatic excommunication. Part of the mission of the Saints Alive apostolate is continuing education and explanation of true veneration of the relics.

### **The 'true' cross?**

Skeptics often remark that if all the purported relics of the True Cross of Christ were put together, one could rebuild Noah's ark. Serafin counters with the research of Rohault de Fleury, who in 1870 attempted to catalog all the relics of the cross, including those that were said to have existed but were lost. According to his figures, all the fragments glued together would not have made up more than a third of an average Roman cross.

Pope John Paul II tells us that the "saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history" in *Christifideles Laici* ("The Christian Faithful Laity"). The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us: "The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life such as the veneration of relics" (1674) and points out that these practices, when carefully clarified in the light of faith can enrich Christian life.

Serafin's apostolate started almost by accident when he attempted to acquire a relic of one of his favorite saints, St. Alphonsus Liguori. He began researching the subject of relics and developed a great appreciation for the importance of this sacramental. Eventually, he acquired a substantial collection of relics and, realizing that he should share them, began exhibiting them in churches and giving talks about their history, significance and veneration. Now he organizes days of recollection along with other featured speakers in conjunction with the exhibits.

Serafin pointed out that veneration of the relics draws people closer to the saints. At displays of the relics, he said, older Catholics are happy to see these forgotten treasures. Children, who rarely know anything about relics, become excited when they see these physical reminders of the saints, and often bring their parents and friends to the displays.

Serafin, a professional photographer in Los Angeles, spends much of his free time on the apostolate's work. In addition to visiting churches, displaying the relics and giving talks, he has used his photography skills to put together a beautiful color brochure. He has completed the text of a booklet about relics and hopes to publish it this year. He also actively campaigns to rescue relics from places where they are not appreciated, and to convince the owners of these treasures to treat them with more respect.

More than one religious group has asked his help in making their relics presentable for display. As the founder and director of Saints Alive, Serafin is particularly pleased to have been given an apostolic blessing from Pope John Paul II for his work. He also treasures the beautiful letter of encouragement he received in 1995 from Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

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# Photographer loans holy relics to Forest Lawn

*Artifacts part of display that opens today*

By Helen Gao, Staff Writer

**PASADENA STAR NEWS**, Saturday, Nov. 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 the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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 South Glendale Ave. "Manger to Martyr: Veneration of Relics" is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily through Jan. 27.

Thomas 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," he said.

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 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 where Christ was born; a piece of the cloak once worn by Joseph, Mary's husband; and a rock from where the Ark of the Covenant stood for 85 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," said Msgr. Francis Weber, director of the San Fernando Mission, which has a relic collection of its own. "It's so beautifully illustrated with the (stained-glass) windows."

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," said Leonora Bouzas, who works as a cashier at the cemetery and has relics of her own. "People who had one time lived and are so strong and do not mind pain or suffering for their beliefs."

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 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 personally designed many reliquaries for his collection.

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

## **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 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 where Christ was born; a piece of the cloak once worn by Joseph, Mary's husband; and a rock from where the Ark of the Covenant stood for 85 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 beautifully 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 Web site called Saints Alive and the International Crusade for Holy Relics, which monitors the trading of relics on the Internet.

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## Physically connecting with faith

Relics bring Christians into contact with saints of the past.

**Glendale News – Press**

November 9, 2001

By Marshall Allen

GLENDALE -- 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 Arimathea 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 integrant 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.

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 confected 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."

# It's Not Mere Bones They Sell

## *International Crusade Fights E-Trade in Relics*

By Charles A. Coulombe - May 2001 – **Los Angeles Lay Catholic Mission**

**While the internet has changed many things, it also has provided ever more of the same thing -- commerce.** Whatever was sold through slower means in the past can be vended quickly on the web. So it is that the sale of holy things, called simony -- a very ancient thing -- has returned with a vengeance.

Among the items for sale in the great cyber-bazaar are relics of the saints -- not just second-class relics, like bits of clothes, but first-class relics as well -- actual bones. But if the Internet has introduced a problem, it has also become the vehicle of a solution, in the International Crusade for the Holy Relics, headed by Glendale resident Tom Serafin.

Organized four years ago as an apostolate to spread the traditional Catholic devotion to relics -- a devotion much neglected in the years since Vatican II -- much of the International Crusade's time is now devoted to watching for, and attempting to stop, the sale of relics on the internet.

Typical of the e-letters Serafin and his colleagues send out to relic salesmen is one, dated January 25, 2001, in which he notes that, "over the past two years," there has been an "increased theft of relics from places of worship," and an "increasing concern over the authenticity of numerous relics being dispensed in the United States bearing a particular signature." Sellers, says the letter, often use "an argument that they are not selling the relic, only the locket," the relic being, "supposedly, a gift. It is bad enough that they are sacrilegiously desecrating a sacrament of the Christian church," the letter continues, "but to add insult to injury they de-emphasize the contents of the locket by openly admitting that to them, 'the relic is of no value'. Remove the relic and you have in most cases a \$15 locket (called a 'teca')."

The vendor addressed in the letter did not realize what he was selling, and replied: "Thank you for your email. My store does not sell any first class relics, nor will it ever sell them in the future. I merely sell antique religious items. I originally collected antique religious items myself. Through the course of collecting I noticed a total disregard for these old items. Antique

shops frowned upon these items and put them in old boxes and shoved them under the counter to collect dust until they are eventually thrown away. Many very genuine people like to collect and respect these old items and literally save them from the dumpsters. I only give them the means of obtaining them. Relics are a very different story. Actual pieces of the saints that were filled with the Holy Spirit should remain within the Church who insures their respect and safety."

But the vendor was still not aware of all that she had. Serafin replied: "You have [relics] in the crosses (two) that I personally saw on your website. I've copied the pages for reference." Once informed, the vendor, who mentioned she was Catholic, replied: "All the relics from my website have been removed. I do not wish to contribute to the reckless buying/selling of relics."

While this particular encounter had a happy ending, many vendors are not so cooperative. Moreover, many relics are sold via auctions on amazon.com or e-bay. "We monitor the net," said Serafin, "and we try to persuade the companies to cancel relic auctions. We've contacted law enforcement agencies, because selling body parts -- which relics count as -- over the net is illegal. But they tell us that the net is like the Wild West, and there is just no way to enforce the laws. So we keep working."

One notorious vendor of relics on the web attempted to counterattack, claiming that "the diocese isn't recognizing" the International Crusade. "I know that they [Serafin's group] can't afford my relics; they don't want to buy them anyway, they want them for free. This is their whole concept, to get them for nothing for their self-indulgence, not to rescue anything." But despite his threat to go to the attorney general and the cardinal, the dealer eventually gave up because Crusade members continually e-mailed e-bay, who hosted the dealer's auctions, and reminded them of their own rules against allowing the sale of body parts on their site.

Where do the relics for sale come from? "Catholics let them go to relic sellers," said Serafin. Many come from France, Spain, and Italy, from religious houses, from churches -- almost all of this is approved of by some cleric or other. Every relic should be in the hands of Catholics who'll give it due veneration. I have written Rome on several occasions, but never received a reply. I can see if someone *has* to sell the reliquary for monetary reasons -- but then, you should just remove the relic."

But if Serafin's and the International Crusade's efforts have gone unnoticed by the Holy See, other high-ranking Catholics have recognized their often successful work. On March 25, 1999, Dom Duarte Pio, Duke of Braganza and heir to the Portuguese throne, made Serafin a Knight of the Portuguese Order of Our Lady of the Conception of Vila Vicosa. The duke is also a member of the International Crusade. Branches of the International Crusade have sprung up overseas, including one in Fatima. Through their efforts, thousands of relics have been returned to veneration, and thousands more removed from sale.

How did Serafin's work with relics begin? "About ten years ago, I started reading a lot of St. Alphonsus Liguori," said Serafin. "I liked him because there's no gray in his writings -- it's black and white. Anyway, I wanted a relic of him. All the Redemptorists I wrote to said that it was impossible to get one; I soon learned that relics weren't being venerated either!

I decided that I should start recovering relics and returning them to veneration. A decade later, I have over 1200. I met a number of like-minded people, and we formed the International Crusade four years ago."

In regard to the sale of other Church goods, like vestments and sacred vessels, Serafin brought up the \$25 million Doheny Collection of sacred vessels and vestments left to the archdiocese, which Roger Cardinal Mahony sold in the mid-80s to various buyers for \$9 million. "One Sunday, after Mass at St. Andrew's in Pasadena," said Serafin, "I walked about two blocks up and found an antique store filled with 17th and 18th century vestments from the collection. I asked the owner what people were buying them for, and he said, 'oh, all sorts of things. Halloween costumes, slip-covers, that sort of thing.' I saw what turned out to be a 19th century French chalice veil draped over the arm of a sofa. It had red wine stains, so I bought it, in case they were from the Precious Blood. But at least there were no relics sold there!"

Serafin and the ICHR continue their work, and are always looking for more associates. Contact them at: International Crusade for Holy Relics-ICHRusa, Chevalier Thomas J. Serafin, V.V., P.O.Box 21301, Los Angeles, CA. 90021; [www.ICHRusa.com](http://www.ICHRusa.com); <http://home.earthlink.net/~saintsalive/>

## Ventura County Star - Sacred relics

### **PRICELESS:**

Thomas Serafin has an exhibit of holy items he plans to keep above eBay.

**By Tom Kiskan, Staff writer**

The nearly microscopic scrap of wood, Thomas Serafin asserts, was once part of the cross on which Jesus died. A bit of cloth was part of a veil worn by the Virgin Mary with a thread strand coming from Joseph's cloak.

Serafin has 1,200 such relics collected from sources as disparate as a Catholic cardinal in Rome and a swap meet vendor. He has black brass nails that, according to authenticity documents accompanying the pieces, were made by filings from nails used in Christ's crucifixion. He has a fragment of a habit worn by Pope John XXIII. He has wood from a confessional used by Father Junipero Serra, who founded California's missions.

The Glendale photographer displays his collection at churches and currently in an exhibit at a Glendale museum. Serafin believes relics belong in the public, serving as sacred reminders of martyrs and other saints, emphasizing sacrifices made of faith.

What infuriates him is when he sees similar relics for sale by the thousands on the eBay Internet auction site -- items linked to saints Agatha, Lucy, Pacifica and Agnes on bid for \$99 and another collection including a relic of Mary Magdalene priced at \$159. Serafin contends such sales exploit people's faith and represents the Catholic sin of simony, named for the magician who, according to the Bible, tried unsuccessfully to bribe the apostles.

"People who are selling them are the same as Judas," he said. "They're betraying their faith. They're selling them to get their 30 pieces of silver."

Serafin worries relics have become forgotten sacraments, pushed out of church altars in a tide some people attribute to the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and others to contemporary culture. He is concerned many of the people who venerated saints and used relics in

prayer have either discarded the items or left them with disinterested relatives.

"The very people who don't think they have any value are the ones who are putting them up for sale," he said, worrying some of the people buying the relics use them as jewelry, novelties or even satanic practices. "One of the relic sellers was a dominatrix. There have been a lot of weird people selling them as well as buying them."

Serafin's International Crusade for Holy Relics, designed in part to stop Internet auctions, includes a Web site with information on the potential for fraud. He tells of an auction that initially purported to be selling a relic linked to St. Stephen of Hungary though officials in Budapest told Serafin the item was safe in a cathedral and definitely not for sale.

He alleges some people may sell items that have been stolen. Or they may auction relics under multiple listings, using the different bids to leverage the price higher.

eBay is a buyer-beware world, said Kevin Pursglove, a spokesman for the San Jose-based auction company. The site offers no guarantees of authenticity and people are able to sell whatever they want as long as they don't violate any laws.

The demand for relics has been strong for several years. Pursglove said that, of the about 7 million goods that can be found on eBay at any time, about 40,000 are religious relics.

Well aware of the turbulent religious debates, Pursglove said eBay has decided to let its users sit as judge and jury.

"eBay is a trading venue and it's up to the individuals who buy and sell to determine whether an item is appropriate," he said. "We don't want to attempt to become the referee."

### ***Determined to preserve:***

Serafin, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., is 49 and has worked for the same photo studio for 18 years. He has been collecting for about a dozen years. A lifelong Catholic, he uses the title chevalier to denote being knighted by a Portuguese religious order, partly for donating more than 100 relics to a shrine in Fatima.

"But he's a very level-headed, average kind of guy," said Mike Gibson, a Torrance lawyer recruited by Serafin to help form a nonprofit group, the Apostolate for Holy Relics. "His enthusiasm is contagious."

Monsignor Francis Weber, archivist for the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, talks about Serafin's determination to preserve and promote relics, noting the biggest barrier may be public disinterest.

"The skepticism is that at the present time, relics are not in," Weber said. "They're not things that most Catholics even know about. They're sacramentals and right now sacramentals are not popular."

Meet Serafin at the hilltop museum overlooking the endless grounds of the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale and he shows one of the prizes of a collection that fills two private safes -- a tiny strand of hair documented as being from the Virgin Mary. Alongside it are three strands purported to be from Joseph's cloak.

All of the items at the museum come with papers of authenticity, usually from a religious order and sometimes direct from the Vatican. Weber and Serafin acknowledge the obvious: The older items are the most difficult to authenticate.

Paul Ford, an instructor at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo who studies saints and sacraments, is leery of anything linked to the life of Jesus. He noted that about 300 years lapsed after the crucifixion before the Roman empress Helena journeyed to the Holy Land and collected what she pronounced as sacred treasures from the life of Jesus.

The gap is too large to assess relics of the cross or the manger with any certainty, Ford said.

Serafin disagrees but acknowledged there is no absolute way to know the source of some of the relics. He believes the larger truth is that the people they represent lived. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary built a Franciscan Hospital. Saint Agnes was killed when she was 13 because she refused to renounce her faith. Maximilian Kolbe was imprisoned at Auschwitz during the Holocaust and gave his life to save another man.

It's those achievements and sacrifices Serafin believes resonate from his collection. Framed in ornamental cases and, in one case, a painting of Mary and baby Jesus, the relics are a link to history and to heaven. He said they make the heroic stories ring true.

"It's not like a painting or a statue because these are actual pieces of the saints," Serafin said. "I'm a real firm believer in tradition. If you don't have a past, you don't have a future."

Serafin's goals include starting a permanent display of relics in Southern California, developing an exhibit that would tour nationally and finding other ways to educate people about the thousands of Catholic saints.

His Forest Lawn exhibit chronicles not only the popes and the days of Jesus but little-known martyrs and saints such as Blaise, the fourth-century doctor who is said to have once rescued a child choking on a fish bone and is now the patron saint of throat illnesses. Saint Elizabeth's husband died fighting in the Christian Crusades. She built a Franciscan hospital in Hungary and is the patron saint of bakers, the homeless, widows and young brides.

Serafin finds the relics everywhere -- a guy in Buffalo who once collected such items for the Vatican, religious orders and monks. The relic of Mary's hair came from a man who needed money and was considering using an Internet auction. Serafin offered the assurance the items would be preserved and venerated, along with an extra nudge.

"I gave him a donation," said Serafin, noting the total amount for a small collection of relics was about \$3,000.

He considers selling the items a sin, but he thinks "donations" are different. Pursglove of eBay isn't sure he understands the distinction.

Semantics aside, if a relic can be bought off the Internet, he asked, why shouldn't it be available on eBay?

Serafin thinks the difference rests in the motive.

"It's sinful to sell a relic but it's not sinful to bring them back to the church," he said, distancing himself from online auctioneers. "I'm not going to resell them. I'm not going to desecrate them. I gather the relics up and I take them out to the public."

-- Tom Kisken's e-mail address is [kisken@insidevc.com](mailto:kisken@insidevc.com).

On the Net: Check Serafin's sites at [ichrusa.com](http://ichrusa.com). and [www.ichrusa.com/saintsalive/](http://www.ichrusa.com/saintsalive/).  
**January 12, 2002**

## **MOTHERHOUSE HOLDS BODIES OF 7 EARLY SAINTS**

By Joan Little of The Post-Dispatch

Thomas J. Serafin, a Californian, started "Saints Alive!" six years ago to re-educate Catholics about the need for venerating and preserving relics. He says he has collected more than 800 relics that he keeps in a vault at his home. He also has a Web page on the Internet and co-founded a group called the International Crusade for Holy Relics. "The whole idea of our group is to bring back veneration to the relics," Serafin said.

(copy extracted from larger article)

## **RELIGIOUS RELICS ARE TURNING UP ON THE INTERNET.**

By Elizabeth Neff of the Chicago Tribune – August 6, 2000

Tom Serafin, a professional photographer in Los Angeles who is considered to have one of the largest collections of relics on the West Coast, often speaks out against the sale of relics on the Internet, especially at inflated prices.

Such Internet sales can lead to theft of relics from places of worship, said Serafin, who started acquiring his collection of about 1200 relics eight years ago through religious groups, clergy and people who know he takes the objects on tours to encourage public veneration.

(copy extracted from larger article)

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## Relics for Sale

*The Osgood File(CBS Radio Network): 3/1/02*

### **The International Crusade for Holy Relics hopes to shut down online sales of holy relics.**

With the popularity of online auctions like eBay, even splinters of the bones of St. John the Baptist and the earthly remains of other saints are up for quick sale on the Internet. These holy relics are venerated as sacred reminders of Christian virtue, and Catholic Canon law forbids their sale. That's why Thomas Serafin has founded the International Crusade for Holy Relics, an organization comprised of Roman Catholics, and members of the Russian Orthodox, Byzantine and Anglican churches. Serafin says that some of the "relics" for sale are actually fakes, but he and other ICHR members want to make sure to "rescue" the real relics by buying them.

Serafin says that prior to the Internet there had been virtually no trafficking of relics for the last 500 years. He attributes the recent increase in the marketing of relics to pure greed and the ease with which a seller can reach millions of potential customers online. Serafin says in addition to violating Canon law, Internet dealers are charging inflated prices for the relics. That's why Serafin and the 200 other members of the ICHR are on a mission.

Holy relics, which can include the fragments of saints' bodies, pieces of clothing or rosaries, serve as mementos of the individual saint. They have been used by the Catholic, Byzantine, Orthodox and Anglican churches throughout history and are used on altars for high mass. Monsignor Francis Weber, Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese Archivist, says fake relics are easy to identify because genuine relics generally possess official seals and documentation. Still, Serafin says counterfeiters have been brazen with their fake relics. One individual recently tried to sell lockets that he claimed contained air breathed by Jesus Christ himself.

Serafin says that the ICHR is most concerned about the traffic in first-class relics, ones that contain the bone, flesh or hair of a saint. When one is located, the ICHR sends eBay and the sellers and buyers a formal letter stating that the practice of selling holy relics is against Canon Law. Then they try to recover the relic by bidding on it. Kevin Pursglove, an eBay spokesperson, says unless an individual can point out that the selling of an item is a violation of law, it's permissible to sell it on eBay. He adds, however, that eBay does not allow human remains to be sold on the site.

The ICHR restores relic collections that belong to churches and Archdiocesan archives, and collects relics for the organization. Serafin is currently establishing the Relic Foundation, which will purchase relics, preserve them and put them in a traveling exhibit. His first exhibit opens October 24th at the Forest Lawn Museum in Los Angeles and will be the first U.S. exhibition of a large collection of relics since the 1940s.