

Archives and Protecting Relics

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The archivist's first responsibility is to the archives. He or she has a duty to retain the integrity of archives and allow documents to be used impartially. Furthermore, this responsibility extends into the future. Archives serve generations to come – those who want to look at the historical records long after we are all dead - as well as those who come now.

The word relic comes from the Latin reliquiae (the counterpart of the Greek leipsana) , meaning "remains", and a form of the Latin verb relinquere, to "leave behind, or abandon".

A reliquary is a shrine that houses one or more religious relics. which already before the propagation of Christianity was used in its modern sense, viz., of some object, notably part of the body or clothes, remaining as a memorial of a departed saint.

Relics in the Church have always received particular veneration and attention because the body of the Blessed and of the Saints, destined for the resurrection, has been on earth the living temple of the Holy Spirit and the instrument of their holiness, recognized by the Apostolic See through beatification and canonization.[1] The relics of the Blessed and of the Saints may not be displayed for the veneration of the faithful without a proper certificate of the ecclesiastical authority who guarantees their authenticity.

The body of the Blessed and of the Saints or notable parts of the bodies themselves or the sum total of the ashes obtained by their cremation are traditionally considered significant relics. Diocesan Bishops, Eparchs, those equivalent to them in law and the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints reserve for these relics a special care and vigilance in order to assure their preservation and veneration and to avoid abuses. They are, therefore, preserved in properly sealed urns and are kept in places that guarantee their safety, respect their sacredness and encourage their cult.

Little fragments of the body of the Blessed and of the Saints as well as objects that have come in direct contact with their person are considered non-significant relics. If possible, they must be preserved in sealed cases. They are, however, preserved and honoured with a religious spirit, avoiding every type of superstition and illicit trade.

CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS:

INSTRUCTION "RELICS IN THE CHURCH: AUTHENTICITY AND PRESERVATION"

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First class: parts of a saint's body — often bones, blood, or hair — and any objects directly associated with Christ, such as the true cross.

Second class: objects that have come in direct contact with the saint when alive, including clothing or personal possessions.

Third class: items that have touched a first or second-class relic.

When Catholicism was still illegal under the Roman Empire, early members of the Faithful would meet in underground catacombs to escape harsh persecution. They would celebrate Mass on the stone slabs covering the tombs of martyrs in order to show proper reverence for the ultimate sacrifice they made for Christ.

When Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, Mass no longer needed to be held underground out of necessity. Moving above ground, they didn't leave behind the tradition of venerating the relics of saints. Churches were generally built over the remains of martyrs, but when not possible a first-class relic was placed within the altar and covered by a stone slab.

The Second Council of Nicaea would later decree that all churches were to have altars containing relics of saints. Eventually, the practice became ecclesiastical law, with early editions of the Roman Pontifical mandating altars to contain first-class relics from two separate saints, one of which a martyr.

The Second Vatican Council affirmed and simplified the ancient practice:

“The practice of placing relics of Saints, even those not Martyrs, under the altar to be dedicated is fittingly retained. Care should be taken, however, to ensure the authenticity of such relics.” – Roman Missal (302)

Can. 1187 It is permitted to reverence through public veneration only those servants of God whom the authority of the Church has recorded in the list of the saints or the blessed.

Can. 1188 The practice of displaying sacred images in churches for the reverence of the faithful is to remain in effect. Nevertheless, they are to be exhibited in moderate number and in suitable order so that the Christian people are not confused nor occasion given for inappropriate devotion.

Can. 1189 If they are in need of repair, precious images, that is, those distinguished by age, art, or veneration, which are exhibited in churches or oratories for the reverence of the faithful are never to be restored without the written permission of the ordinary; he is to consult experts before he grants permission.

Can. 1190 §1. It is absolutely forbidden to sell sacred relics.

§2. Relics of great significance and other relics honoured with great reverence by the people cannot be alienated validly in any manner or transferred permanently without the permission of the Apostolic See.

§3. The prescript of §2 is valid also for images which are honoured in some church with great reverence by the people.

Horror stories are told of prominent churches “disposing” of these now unnecessary treasures in bonfires outside the church. Hordes of relics were thrown out or sold (something never allowed) from convents during renovations or property sale. Religious and laity with the wherewithal scooped them up for safekeeping until a better day.

Preservation:

Relics, chalices, ciboria, thuribles, statues, books, altar cloths, altar stones, purificators, seats, cruets, crosses, oil stocks, vestments, monstrance, church organs, tabernacles, pictures, jubilee parchments, pictures of founders, banners, community meeting minutes, archival documents, memorabilia of deceased community members. (medals etc, rosaries, letters, journals, diaries, prayer books, memory cards, prayer cards, room contents)