

The Papal System – XX. The Worship of Relics



Catholic Relics For Sale

Continued from [XIX. Indulgences](#).

THE most remarkable love for articles belonging to Christ and his mother, and for the bones of departed saints and martyrs, sprung up in the fourth century and spread over the world. Every church must have its relic; every village the remains of its protecting saint; and every populous city some bone of an apostle or something consecrated by the touch of the Saviour. In time the Relic Fever sent men all over the East in search of these invaluable treasures; and in execution of the task assumed, they discovered the resting places of saints hidden for five hundred or a thousand years, and they brought home heads of apostles, bones of prophets, and several coats without seam worn by Jesus.

As relic worship grew the living Saviour was set aside for the bodies of his dead servants; the meritorious anguish of His cross was rejected for the wood of his crucifix; His mercy-seat was supplanted by the shrines of saints, and the Name which is above every name was heard at distant intervals, while the powers of scores of saintly carcasses were lauded each day by millions of His professed followers. For centuries an unbridled furor seized the Christian nations, leading them to pay any price for relics; and to become the easy victims of cunning cheats who sometimes sold them the remains of heathens, or the bones of criminals of any creed as the venerable relics of Christ's honored friends. This form of idolatry first showed itself in the worship of

Objects connected with Christ.

The true cross was the most famous of all the relics ever worshiped. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, in the fourth century, searching for it, discovered three crosses, and a piece of wood separate from them, with the words inscribed upon it in Hebrew, Greek and Latin: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." To find Christ's out of the three, by advice of Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, each was applied to a dying lady, but two of them showed no power; when however the third touched her, she opened her eyes and regained her strength. This was decided to be the cross of Jesus. The greater portion of it was preserved in a silver case and kept in Jerusalem. A part of it was sent by the empress to her son in Constantinople with the nails by which the body of Jesus was fastened on it, and wherever

the cross or the nails were carried they were honored with worship.

The Cross of Apamea.

After the capture of Antioch, about A.D. 540, by the Persians, the people of Apamea, who had possession of the true cross, ordered its guardian Thomas to bring it out that they might kiss it for the last time; and as they expected death from the army of Chosroes, that they might obtain from it "Provision for the passage to another life;" and they rejoiced in this "Precious cross as their means of transport to the better lot."

The Cross carried into Persia.

In A. D. 621 the Persian army is reported to have laid waste Jerusalem; to have slain many thousands of the people; and to have carried off "The precious wood of the cross" into their country. This loss was regarded as a heavy calamity to the Christian nations.

The Cross in Constantinople.

In the seventh century, in the Rotunda Church of New Rome, during three days in "Holy Week" a portion of the cross was exposed on a golden altar, where the emperor, court, army, clergy, and others went at different hours to kiss that sacred wood.

The Cross in Rome.

In A.D. 695 Pope Sergius found in the sacristy of the blessed Peter at Rome a large piece of the Lord's cross, which, every year on the day of the "Exaltation of the same life giving cross, is wont to be kissed and revered by all the people at Rome."

The Cross in England.

About A.D. 938 king Athelstan received as gifts a piece of the true cross, a small portion of the crown of thorns, and the sword of Constantine the Great, on the hilt of which, upon thick plates of gold, was fastened one of the four nails by which Jesus was secured to the cross.

In the year A.D. 1223 a clergyman came to England from the East, and sold to the monks of St. Alban a crucifix and two fingers of St. Margaret; and to the monks of Bromholm in Norfolk he gave a cross made out of the wood on which the Saviour hung, on condition, that they would receive him and his two children among them. Immediately it began to work miracles; it raised the dead, made the lame walk, cleansed the lepers, and cast out devils. "The said cross is frequently worshiped, not only by the English people, but also by those from distant countries who have heard of its miracles."

The Cross in France.

In A.D. 1241, "The holy cross of our Lord" was obtained by France through the king; his mother Blanche; and "by the grace of Christ seconding their pious wishes." It was purchased at a high price. The king the year before had

secured possession of the Saviour's crown of thorns. On the Friday before Easter, "The king, with his wife and mother and brothers, riding in a carriage at the head of a procession, with archbishops, bishops, abbots, and other religious men, with nobles, and a countless host of people, raised the cross above his head with tears, and all worshiped it with due reverence and devotion." When the cross and crown of thorns reached the cathedral all the bells in the city were rung; and as the king and clergy and people returned from the worship of the cross and crown of thorns, with clasped hands glorifying God, a sight "more joyful the kingdom of France had never seen." All Paris was enraptured by the possession of new Deities.

At Venice there is a Portion of the True Cross,

And it, with a part of the Saviour's dress, and some of the earth which imbibed his blood, is exposed for the veneration of the faithful.

Parts of the true cross are still exhibited at Rome and elsewhere; and the people are invited to adore it as if it had power to impart some wonderful gift.

It is impossible to estimate the quantity of the wood of the true cross which existed at one time in Europe; but it may be safely affirmed that there was enough to make a number of huge crucifixes, All this wood was devoutly venerated and preserved, as the most sacred earthly treasure. And yet there never existed *credible evidence that one piece of it belonged to the cross on which Jesus was nailed.*

The Blood of Christ brought to England.

In A.D. 1247, a portion of the Saviour's blood, in a beautiful crystalline vessel, was presented to the King of England. It was attested by a document, with many seals, from the patriarch of Jerusalem, and the bishops, abbots, clergy, and nobles of the Holy Land, as a part of the "blood of our Lord which he shed upon the cross." It was received with the greatest reverence, and carried by the king, attended by the great and the godly, to Westminster, where the Bishop of Norwich preached a sermon expounding its glories, and declaring that "Whoever worshiped this most holy blood would, by the permission of all the prelates, obtain free remission of penances *for six years, and a hundred and forty days.*" His lordship of Norwich was not quite as liberal in his application of the Saviour's blood as the apostle John, who says (1 John i. 7): "The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanses us from all sins," without limitation as to time. The monkish historian tells us, there were those who questioned the genuineness of the blood.

The Lance which pierced the Saviour's Side is found.

In A.D. 1098, Peter of Provence had a visit from St. Andrew in a dream, who told him three times to go to the church of St. Peter in Antioch, in which, by following his instructions, he would discover the lance which penetrated the Saviour. The lance was easily uncovered. And the people hearing the glad news, "flocked to the Church and worshiped so precious a relic."

The Robe of Christ is obtained at Zaphat.

In A.D. 594, through the *confession of a Jew*, the famous coat of the Saviour was discovered at Zaphat; and carried by three bishops to Jerusalem. It was without seam, But it is difficult to see the proof furnished either by the Jew or the bishops, that this garment was ever worn by Jesus.

In A.D. 1156, another coat of Christ without seam was found, by revelation, in France. And this robe, as the letters found with it showed, had been made by his mother; and enlarged itself as he grew. Several other robes of Christ have been exhibited at different times for the veneration of the faithful.

The Likeness of Christ.

When Tiberias the Emperor was ill, it is said that he heard of the fame of Jesus as a physician; and that ignorant of his death he sent for him. His messenger became acquainted with Veronica, a friend of the Saviour in Jerusalem. She, on a certain occasion, was taking a linen cloth to an artist to have a picture of Jesus painted upon it, when she met him; and on learning her business, he took the cloth for a moment, and then handed it to her, bearing a likeness of his adorable countenance. Veronica brought her picture to Tiberias; and it healed him the moment he looked upon it. This imaginary likeness is in St. Peter's at Rome now.

The Holy Staircase at Rome.

In the Baptistery of St. John de Lateran, in Rome, are the marble stairs of Pilate's house in Jerusalem, down which Jesus came from the judgment seat, and which he stained with his blood; they are nearly covered with boards to protect them. They were brought through the air, as Catholics believe, ages ago, to Rome; and they possess astonishing merit yet. Devotees in millions have ascended them. Luther passed over them on his knees to gain their matchless virtue. And notwithstanding the light of the nineteenth century, and the jeers of Protestant spectators, pilgrims still ascend the worn marble stairs, devoutly kissing each step as they approach it; and by this sacred performance securing an extensive indulgence.

The Cradle of Jesus is in Rome.

The identical cradle in which the infant Jesus was rocked, it is imagined, enriches a great Roman Church, and claims the veneration of Christendom.

A Piece of Christ's Manger

Was in All-Saints' Church in Wittemburg when Luther began his labors in that city. And in Wittemburg, soon after, a vendor of indulgences, following his calling, wore a feather on his head plucked from the wing of Michael, the archangel. In the Church of the Escorial, near Madrid, the Rev. Joseph Blanco White saw one of the babes of Bethlehem which Herod butchered.

A Garment of the Virgin Mary in France.

Charles the Bald brought to France from Constantinople a certain linen

garment belonging to the Saviour's mother. The people of Chartres became the fortunate possessors of this article.

When Rollo and his Northmen, in A.D. 912, attacked Chartres, the inhabitants made no appeal to Jehovah, nor any effort to gather an army, but hoisted the linen garment as a standard. At first the enemy laughed, and directed arrows at it: then their eyes grew dim, and they could neither retreat nor advance; and they became an easy prey to their triumphant foes, who slew them without mercy.

The Hair of the Virgin Mary at Croyland.

In A.D. 975, when Turketul, Abbot of Croyland, was about to die, he had the treasures of the convent exhibited to the brethren. And among these, according to Ingulph, one of his successors, was "Some of the hair of the Mother of God, enclosed in a gold box."

The Chains of St. Peter.

The fetters which bound him in Jerusalem, when the angel set him at liberty, are sacredly guarded in Rome at this day; and give their name to one of its oldest churches. Where they came from no one knows. And it is pretty certain Peter was not the bearer of them to the Eternal City; for he does not show any special love for them in his conduct when he was set at liberty, or in his epistles. The popes have rasped off filings of these chains, and sent them as presents to princes, and the sacred dust has often wrought miracles.

Peter's Chair.

The holy seat occupied by Simon, if he ever was in Rome, is in St. Peter's. The chair is enclosed in a huge gilded exterior of bronze, and it lends sanctity to the noblest church edifice in the world.

John the Baptist's Head.

It was discovered by some monks of the Macedonian sect in the reign of the Emperor Valens, who commanded that it should be brought to Constantinople. But the mules drawing the carriage in which it was conveyed stopped at Pantichium, in Chalcedonia, and no lashing or coaxing could move them one step farther. The miracle was clear, and there for a time the head remained. Subsequently, the Emperor Theodosius "prompted by an impulse from God, or from the prophet" removed it to a place in the suburbs of Constantinople, where he erected for it a magnificent church. Matthew Paris tells us of a head of John the Baptist, apparently a second, which was taken to Edessa in A.D. 761. A woman in France was greatly favored by the victim of Herodias. For three years she had prayed for one of his limbs; and then vowed to give up eating till her prayer was heard; after fasting for seven days one of his thumbs was placed upon the altar of the church in which she worshiped. It was wonderfully white; and though John had been dead 615 years, three bishops, in trying to tear a piece from it, drew blood.

An Arm of St. Andrew and the Head of St. Luke.

These precious relics were brought to Rome by Gregory the Great before he became Pope, that his monastery of St. Andrew might enjoy the glorious protection of the famous saints to whom the arm and head belonged.

A Thumb of St. Bartholomew.

One of the most distinguished abbots of Croyland, the blessed Turketul, in A.D. 975, had a thumb of this saint; and he set such a high value upon it, that "He always carried it about with him; and in all times of danger, tempest, and lightning crossed himself therewith."

St. Alban the Martyr

Had lain for centuries in a dishonored and unknown grave; and in A.D. 794, when the world was searched for relics, those of our saint were found. Offa, King of Mercia, as he lay on his couch one night, was warned by an angel to take Alban the saint up out of the earth, and to place his remains in a repository more worthy of them. The king knew nothing of Alban's resting place; and no one on earth had any better information. He gathered a great multitude of his people at Verolamium, and he saw a "Ray of light, like a flash of lightning descending towards the sepulchre;" and soon they found the supposed remains of Alban; they were delighted beyond measure with their success. The thousands form a solemn procession and carry the relics to a church singing hymns and praises. Alban has a new coffin, exquisitely fashioned of gold and silver and precious stones; and for centuries is incessantly engaged in working astonishing miracles.

The Ashes of the Prophet Samuel.

In the time of the Emperor Arcadius, the relics of Samuel were found and carried to Constantinople with extraordinary demonstrations of delight. They were placed in a golden urn and covered with a silken veil. The highways from Palestine to the city of the Caesars were filled with an uninterrupted procession; and the emperor at the head of the most illustrious members of the senate and clergy went forth to greet his extraordinary guest.

The Blood of St. Januarius.

This saint was martyred in the fourth century. His head is in the Cathedral of Naples, and some of his blood in two very old glass vials. Repeatedly he has saved Naples from destruction, when its citizens were alarmed by Vesuvius. In 1707, as the volcano threatened a fearful flood of lava, his shrine was carried by the clergy and people to the foot of the mountain, and instantly its eruptions ceased. His blood is congealed, but when brought near the head it melts and bubbles up. It does the same thing regularly on his feast-day, September 19th, and on the 20th of December. If there is any alarm in Naples the blood is consulted, and if it melts all is right; and joy is universal. When the French took possession of the city, the vials were mined, and there was no liquefaction, and the people showed signs of insurrection; but the French commander threatened to shoot the priest if the miracle was not performed in ten minutes; and the blood melted immediately. Of course Januarius is the Deity of Naples.

A City Protected by the Relics of a Martyr.

In A.D. 540, Chosroes led an army against Sergiopolis. There were no men in the city who could resist such a chieftain. But the relics of the victorious martyr Sergius, lying in a coffin within its walls, caused the miraculous appearance of innumerable shields all around Sergiopolis, as soon as the hostile army approached, and Chosroes and his hosts, justly alarmed, retired.

Simeon the Pillar Saint

Spent thirty years on a column sixty feet high; and after his death there was a controversy as to the place his remains should protect. The neighboring cities all wanted Simeon. The emperor wished his guardian care. Antioch urged the strongest claim. Its people said: "We have no walls, for we have been visited in wrath by their fall; we have brought hither the sacred body to be our wall and bulwark." And the old weather-beaten tenement of clay fell to their lot, and remained entire in their city, except some holy teeth, stolen by "faithful men" to shield them against calamity.

St. Genevieve stops a Plague in Paris.

This lady was born about A.D. 422. She is the chief protectress of Paris. In A.D. 1129, a pestilential fever, with a violent inward heat and pains in the bowels, carried off in a short time fourteen thousand persons. The medical art was powerless. The clergy of Paris implored the divine mercy by fastings and supplications, but the Lord would not hear them. Not so Genevieve. They carried her shrine in procession to the cathedral, and many of the sick were cured by touching it. And of all that lay ill when the appeal was made to St. Genevieve only three died; and no others from that time took the disease. If this story were true, little wonder that God should be neglected, and St. Genevieve honored. And in such stories the Catholic Church abounds.

Triumph of St. Martin.

There was a bitter controversy between the friends of St. Martin and St. German in reference to the powers of their relics. To settle the question, a leprous man, wasted to a skeleton, was placed between the two saints for a whole night; in the morning the side next St. Martin was healed, while the other was unchanged. The next night the diseased side was placed along St. Martin, and in the morning the man was completely restored; both sides were free from leprosy. The monkish historian gravely remarks: "Thus the Turonians (the friends of St. Martin) safely filled their common purse by the assistance of their patron."

St. Guthlac's Relics.

In A. D. 851, a severe disease scourged the whole of England; it was a kind of paralysis, by which the hands and arms became useless, and were withered up; the attacks of this malady were preceded by intolerable pains. At last St. Guthlac was remembered, and "innumerable multitudes of the sick from the whole land flocked daily to his most holy tomb, and sought the divine grace through the merits of the most holy confessor Guthlac," and sometimes in one

day a hundred persons were healed. The number of favored ones soon was legion, belonging to all classes of society, from Ceolnoth, Archbishop of Canterbury, down to the poorest serf. And the abbot of St. Guthlac's convent, after being tried by the utmost poverty, began "to abound in all things," through the thronging myriads who gathered at the tomb of his patron.

The Head of King Edmund Speaks after it was Cut Off.

When Edmund was decapitated by the order of savage Hinguar, the head was taken to the woods and thrown among the thick bushes and brambles, that his body might distress his friends when they found it. A good while after, Hinguar removed from that locality, and the followers of Edmund went in search of his head; as one of them cried to another: Where are you? an answer was returned by the king's head: Here, here, here! Nor did it cease speaking till all the seekers were gathered around it. And then a huge wolf of savage aspect embraced the head of the saintly king in his fore legs, where he had faithfully guarded it. As they took it away he meekly followed them till it was interred with the body, when he returned to his native wilds. King Edmund was a special friend of the clergy.

The Relics of St. Werebuge extinguish a Fire.

Tn A.D. 1180, a desolating conflagration raged in Chester, of which St. Werebuge was patroness; and though it threatened to consume the whole city, it was immediately extinguished, when the monks carried in procession the shrine of the saint, with devout prayers. It would be a blessing to have the relics of half a dozen such saints in each of our American cities.

The Relics of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Aquinas was a man of prodigious intellect and of immense influence: highly cultivated for his age, and beyond it in many of his conceptions. He died in A.D. 1274. One of his arms was cut off in 1288 and given to his sister, the Countess Theodora. His body was carried into France, and received at Toulouse by a hundred and fifty thousand people, led by the king's brother and by many archbishops and bishops. It now rests in a rich shrine in that city. An arm was given to the Dominican Church in Paris. A bone of his arm was presented to the Dominicans at Naples, where his intercession delivered the kingdom from a public calamity.

Thomas A'Becket's Relics.

This saint was Archbishop of Canterbury. As a churchman he cared for nothing but the glory of the clergy. Had he been able he would have placed the king and nation under the heel of the meanest ecclesiastic in the land. As among popes, Gregory VII. stands forth unequaled in talent and tyranny, so A'Becket appears among bishops.

If Providence had in wrath bestowed a few more A'Beckets upon the nations in past ages, and restrained the hands of enraged menslayers, Christendom would have had no rights except the right to be governed by priests in everything, and scourged for each act of disobedience.

The relics of this proud, unworthy man were the most famous and powerful in Europe. At his translation, his body was placed in a coffin elaborately worked with gold and jewels. The clergy of England were represented by all the dignitaries and an immense body of priests. France and other European countries sent throngs of ecclesiastics. The nation was moved as if a new Advent was about to come, and all Europe felt the excitement.

Kings visited his tomb for healing; and nations might be said to have gathered around it for the same purpose.

The most astounding fables are told about the cures effected by A'Becket. "The lame walk, the deaf hear, the blind see, the dumb speak, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are made alive; animals and birds felt the power of his miracle-working relics." Wealth was showered upon his bones. A royal diamond was given by Louis, King of France; the church all around the relics abounded with princely riches; with pure gold garnished with precious stones. The shrine containing the remains was about the height of a man; it was covered with plates of gold, adorned with brooches, images, angels, chains, jewels, and great oriental pearls. When Henry VIII. seized the shrine, its spoils in gold and jewels filled "two great chests, one of which six men could carry with difficulty out of the church."

In one year there was offered at the shrine of the Virgin at the altar of Christ, and at the shrine of St. Thomas. No wonder that Butler says of the space before the shrine: "The marble stones remain to this day very much worn and hollowed by the knees of the pilgrims who prayed there."

His hairy shirt is in the English college at Douay, a bone of his arm is in the Church of St. Waldegrave at Mons, and his mitre and linen, dipped in his blood, are in St. Bertin at St. Omer. But it would appear that Lord Cromwell, Henry's Vicar General, destroyed the miraculous power of these remaining relics. Here was a man who reached an end which Lucifer was unable to gain in Paradise; he seated himself on Christ's throne in his own kingdom and turned him out of it; and nearly expelled the Virgin Mary from the hearts of her worshipers.

Relics were the most Sacred Things to swear by.

Asser, a contemporary of the celebrated Alfred, King of England, in his life of that monarch, speaks of a treaty which he made A. D. 876 with his enemies, which they confirmed with an oath over "the Christian relics, which (relics) with Alfred, were next in veneration after the Deity."

Four Coffers of Relics in the Holy Land.

When Saladin captured Jerusalem, he found four chests filled with bones, each so weighty, that four men could only carry it a short distance. These were the relics of the saints gathered from the sanctuaries. Saladin ordered the bones to be sent to the caliph that the "Christians might no longer believe that they had as intercessors in heaven, those whose bones they worshiped on earth." At this, "all the followers of Christianity were overcome with grief and alarm." King Richard heard of the calamity, and paid Saladin fifty-two

thousand byzants to redeem the sacred treasures.

Over the Christian nations for centuries, the most unaccountable infatuation seized men, women, and children about relics, Any price was given for them, and no man could overtask their supposed power. A dead saint was quite as useful as a living one, perhaps he was more powerful with God than if he were still in the flesh. When it was reported that Romuald, a man of reputed sanctity, was about to leave France, he was quietly informed that if he could not be persuaded to stay, the people intended to kill him to secure the protection of his holy remains. Christianity was lost in the mad idolatries of relic worship during many dark centuries; and in this crazy abomination the spiritual guides of the Catholic Church from the highest to the lowest were the leaders.

The second Council of Nice, regarded by some as the seventh general council, enacted the following law on this subject:

"We decree that whatever venerable churches have been consecrated without holy relics of martyrs, shall have a deposit of relics made in them with the accustomed prayer. And if after the present time any bishop shall be found consecrating a church without holy relics, let him be deposed, as one that transgresses ecclesiastical tradition."

Here then it is broadly asserted that churches were defective without relics; that divine worship was incomplete without the remains of holy martyrs; that all destitute churches must be furnished; and that any bishop should be deposed who shall dedicate a church in future without a sepulchral divinity still bound in the chains of death.

The Council of Trent says:

"Also the sacred bodies of holy martyrs, and of others now living with Christ, which were the living members of Christ, and the temples of the Holy Spirit, and which are to be raised and glorified by Him in an everlasting life, are to be venerated by the faithful. Through their bodies many benefits are bestowed by God on men, so that they who affirm that veneration and honor are not due to the relics of saints, or that these and other sacred monuments are uselessly honored by the faithful, and that the places dedicated to the memories of the saints are vainly visited to procure their aid, are wholly to be condemned, as the Church has already condemned, and now also condemns them."

To worship relics is the duty of all the faithful, and not to render them veneration is a glaring crime in the judgment of the Council of Trent.

The distinction which a Jesuit would make between the veneration and the worship of relics is one which the masses never understood; and for dreary ages it was comprehended by few in the Catholic Church. The wood of the cross, the seamless coat, the images and bones of dead saints, the blood of St. Januarius, were long the gods of Christian nations.

How strange it would sound to hear Paul say: "I am able to do all things, for

I have a thumb of Moses with which I make the sign of the cross when great efforts are needed!" Or to hear David say: "I have a thigh bone of Abraham, and it is my refuge and my strength, a very present help in time of trouble!" Or to hear Luke say: "The Bereans are more noble than those of Thessalonica because they devoutly venerate the head of Isaiah in a golden shrine!" How singular John would have appeared praying to God before a leg of Melchizedek! Or Peter kneeling before the relics of Joseph and venerating them! Or Philip, Stephen, Lazarus, and Martha and Mary, at their devotions in a chapel dedicated to "all saints," before a costly shrine in which were placed a tooth of holy Rahab, the mantle of St. Elijah, a finger of Esther, some of Miriam's hair, the renowned coat of Joseph, and a foot of the mighty Jacob! There is no record of the veneration or worship of one human relic in the Old Testament or in the New. There was not, one adored relic among all the servants of Christ while he lived; nor for two centuries after his death. And as it is written: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," there never should have been a trace of relic worship among the servants of God.

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