

WHY DO CATHOLICS HAVE THIS THING WITH RELICS?

The year was 203AD. The place was the North African city of Carthage. The Roman Emperor, Septimus Severus, was going to have a birthday soon. The Governor wanted to have gladiatorial games to celebrate the event in the local amphitheater. The Emperor hated members of this new religion who called themselves Christians. The Emperor had begun persecuting them throughout the Empire. This prompted a thought in the Governor's mind. "Let's see if we could have some fun with a few of these Christians and some wild beasts. That might turn on the crowd a bit more. And these Christians are expendable. Let's round up a few of them and see what develops." Their names we actually know, they were Perpetua, Saturninus, Secundulus and Saturus (who was the Catechist teaching these young people the Catholic faith). There were also two slaves: Felicity and Revocatus. They were all thrown into a very crowded prison to await the day of reckoning.

Perpetua was a new mom still breast-feeding her son. She was 22. Felicity, a year younger, was 8 months pregnant in a crowded prison with mostly men all around her. It was against Roman law to execute a pregnant woman. Felicity would have to give birth before they could feed her to the wild animals. Two days before the games she birthed a baby girl. Perpetua's mom was a Christian and she was able to get Perpetua's baby to her for a little while. Her father was a pagan and he tried everything to convince her to change her mind. Perpetua had been baptized before she was imprisoned. She was a brave and highly-spirited young woman. There would be no changing her.

All six were led to the beasts in the arena and the beasts attacked them but did not kill them. They were all bloodied but were led from the center of the arena to the Gate Called Sanavivaria—Healing Water. Perpetua kept a diary while in prison and we still have it. On the day before she died she said in her final entry that "I leave the finishing details to another."

That person wrote this. Before the Christians were led back into the center of the arena, "*Saturus said to one of the soldiers (who happened to be Christian also) named Pudens: 'Farewell, and remember your faith as well as me. Do not let these things frighten you; let them strengthen you.' He then asked for the little ring from Pudens' finger. After soaking it in his wound he returned it to Pudens as a keepsake, leaving him a pledge and a remembrance of his blood.*"

The crowds demanded that they all be brought back to the center of the arena so that they could see the swords thrust into and through the bodies of the victims. Without being asked, the six went where the people wanted them to go but first they kissed one another with the customary kiss of peace. The others stood motionless and received the deathblow in silence especially Saturus who had gone up first and was the first to die. Perpetua had to guide the hand of the inexperienced gladiator to her throat—before whom the unclean spirit itself trembled. Bravest and happiest martyrs. You were called and chosen for the glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Soon they were dead—but not forgotten. What they underwent was remembered and spoken of to future generations. The feast day of Saints Perpetua and Felicity is March 7 each year. For the past 1800 years. And that ring dipped in blood? What do you think happened to that? In one sense it may not have been a very valuable ring but in the dipping in the blood of a martyr, it became very valuable indeed. The writer identified it as a keepsake. We, in the Catholic Community give it a different name. We call it a relic. Something from a great saint or martyr for our faith.

You may not know this but in each altar or beneath each altar where Mass is celebrated, there is an altar stone with relics in the four corners or a drawer with relics placed inside. When we celebrate the Mass we stand on the shoulders of the giants of our faith and there are little pieces of bones from their bodies, or small bits of their hair, or a piece of their clothing. Between the Mary Chapel and the nave of the church are tables set up and on those tables are a large number of relics from many saints down through the ages. From modern days back to the early years of our faith. I encourage you to stay and look at them. Offer a kiss of reverence. Pray a short prayer. Ask for the saint's assistance. I placed the relic of Saint Peregrine on a woman just a few days back and there was relief from her pain.

Look at these young people today all dressed in the garb of the particular saint whose name they are taking as their confirmation name. They will be in the Cloister Walk and the Narthex afterward and please slowly look at each one and vote for the one you think is best. They will have shields depicting their own faith journey. Tell them you will pray for them and then actually pray for them. Congratulate them for their involvement in this big step in their faith life. Tell them how much you love to see them when they come to church. Encourage them to continue striving to meet Our Lord Jesus and to live for him and gather here to pray and to give to Our Lord the worship of their hearts on the Lord's day— Saturday night or Sunday. Ask them to pray for a special intention you may have.

Relics are reminders. We are a faith of reminders. Holy water fonts, sign of the cross, genuflecting, medals, scapulars, rosaries. The list goes on. We are helped by these reminders. And be reminded that what goes on here is not new but very ancient and it is now our turn to live the faith and to hand it on. Saint Paul today talks about how he expected those Thessalonian Christians to imitate him and live their faith with conviction and boldness. To save our country and our world from its decline someone has to step up and stand for that which is true and good and beautiful and one. Let it be here. May we be the ones.