

# Act of honoring relics of saints has roots in Bible

I can't think of a more appropriate way to celebrate the end of the millenium than to honor the relics of St. Therese of Lisieux, which will be displayed in Oklahoma City on Dec. 13 and 14. The relics are being brought to 113 religious sites in the United States. Reports indicate that, so far, the crowds which have come to venerate the relics have been larger than expected.

Relics are objects, normally clothing or parts of the body, which remain as a memorial of a departed saint. If you are thinking that relics of saints are just an antiquated superstition, you might reconsider the Biblical evidence supporting the sacred character and the power of relics of the holy ones.

In 2 Kings 13:20-21, a dead man came back to life when his body came into contact with the corpse of the prophet, Elijah. We are told in Acts 5 that, in the early Christian community, the sick were laid on cots in the street in the hopes that, when Peter passed by, his shadow might fall on them and bring healing. In Acts 19, it is said that, "So extraordinary were the mighty deeds God accomplished at the hands of Paul that when face cloths or aprons that touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them."

With regard to the relics of saints who lived and died after Saints Peter and Paul, St. Ambrose wrote, in a letter to his sister, "You see that the miracles of old times are renewed, when through the coming of the Lord Jesus grace was more largely shed forth upon the earth, and that many



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bodies are healed by the shadow of the holy bodies... How many garments, laid upon the holy relics and endowed with healing power, are claimed! All are glad to touch even the outside thread, and whosoever touches will be made whole."

We are so fortunate to have the relics of St. Therese, in particular, come to our state. This Carmelite nun died in France in 1897 at the age of 24. As of the time of her death, she had not done anything that had attracted any special notice. On her deathbed, however, she said, "I will let fall a shower of roses - I will spend my heaven doing good upon earth." According to one historian, her grave was scarcely filled in when "the fragrance of her goodness found its way out."

The fragrance of her goodness became evident when details of her life, including her voluminous correspondence, became known. She remained

faithful and virtuous in the face of depression and religious doubts, finding a way out only in her "Little Way," her trust and absolute self-surrender to the love of God.

One of the beautiful aspects of being Catholic is that we do not see ourselves as disconnected individuals. Each of us is part of the mystical body that is the Church. Each of us joins with the saints in heaven in the "constant hymn of praise" for Jesus that is referenced in our Mass. As we take on the challenges of this life, we are accompanied by the "great cloud of witnesses," referred to in Hebrews 12. All of them, including St. Therese, are constantly watching, cheering us on.

In honoring the relics of St. Therese, then, we don't just celebrate her life. We find joy in what it means to be Catholic. We find joy in the fact that the Catholic Church has persevered for 2,000 years, overcoming internal and external obstacles, and has kept intact the teachings of Jesus. We find joy in the fact that there has never been anything like the Catholic Church in all of history, and we are really just getting started!

Our closing consists of a portion of the Novena Prayer to St. Therese: "O Little Therese of the Child Jesus, please pick for me a rose from the heavenly gardens and send it to me as a message of love... Help me to always believe as you did, in God's great love for me, so that I might imitate your 'Little Way' each day."