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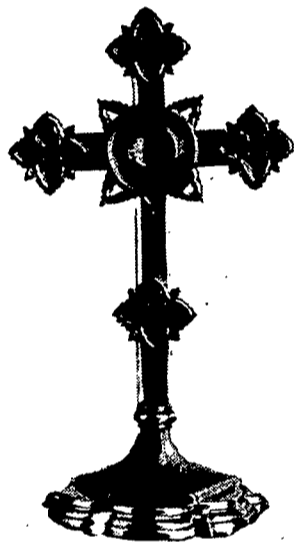


# Catholic Courier

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## RELIQS

### Devotion still holds meaning for many



When Father Bernard Gauthier, CSsR, from the Shrine of St. Anne de Beaupre in Montreal, led a procession around St. Anne's Church on Mount Hope Avenue, Rochester, April 15, some 300 people joined in. Lois DeMistry was among them.

"I wouldn't miss it," DeMistry of St. Anne Church said. "It was a lovely procession - very very heartfelt."

A "nice adoration" of a relic of St. Anne followed, she said. She and the others were privileged to kiss the relic of St. Anne - actually the round metal reliquary containing it - the priest had brought, she said.

Veneration of relics - classified as first-class if a body part, and second- or third-class, if something that came in close contact with a saint and therefore was sanctified - is hardly just a practice of the past, as these and numerous other Catholics testify.

But it definitely dates back years. Joan Carroll Cruz, in her 1984 book *Relics*, describes it as "to some extent, a primitive instinct with origins that predate Christianity." She points, for example, to veneration of the relics of Buddha, who died in 483 B.C., and Confucius, who died around 479 B.C.

Later, as Christianity spread, so did relics of its martyrs. Owning relics became so prestigious that by the fourth century, fake relics and thefts of the real ones plagued the church. Even today canon law forbids selling of sacred relics; transfers of significant relics require permission from the Holy See. The law also warns against relics falling into the wrong hands when estates are settled.

The practice of venerating relics is apparently more common in Europe and certain other areas, than in the Diocese of Rochester.

"Devotion here is more to images than relics," said Father Robert F. McNamara, archivist and long-time priest in the diocese.

But common to many people who do venerate relics is a full devotional life, noted Father Frank E. Lioi, pastor of St. Anne. While the church holds a novena to St. Anne in July, an annual time his parishioners can publicly venerate the church's relic of St. Anne, he said they are primarily interested in the guest preacher and the theme, which usually deals with spiritual growth and renewal.

"Venerating relics should have something to do with my prayer life, because it is an external expression of something I should be doing internally," he said.

"I would say maybe prior to the Second Vatican Council, people's devotional lives centered more on these things, centered more on the saints," he said. "After the council, the focus was put more on the Eucharist, more on central elements of our faith. ... But people like some of the more affective, devotional side to our religious tradition. They like



Father Bernard Gauthier helps the faithful venerate a St. Anne relic at St. Anne Church, Rochester. Also shown are traditional reliquaries containing remains of saints.

Lifelong Learning  
Monthly focus on catechesis

day and others implanted - as was required for centuries - in a fixed altar.

Altar relics are optional nowadays, but Father McNamara tries to stay aware of parish plans for renovation and building, to encourage parishes to perpetuate the tradition. His role of distributing relics to churches that are interested in them blends with his role as archivist, he said. He obtains relics from

the Vicariate of Rome.

"I sort of worked into this," he remarked. "Not many people in the diocese would be interested in this or know much about them."

He prepares documentation of the relics for Bishop Matthew H. Clark to sign when dedicating an altar at a church, and also serves as a witness. The documentation goes into the altar with the relics and into parish and diocesan files. While even pastors often aren't aware of the relics

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Story by Kathleen Schwar • Photographs by Matthew Scott