

## SACRED RELICS

*The Collectio Rerum Liturgicarum of Rev. Joseph Wuest, C.S.S.R., Latin - 1889*  
*Matters Liturgical by Rev. Thomas Mullaney, C.S.S.R., English translation - 1925*

- 168. Authenticity of Relics.** Only those relics can be honored with a public cult in churches, even though exempt, which are certified as genuine in an authentic document of a Cardinal, a local Ordinary, or an ecclesiastic to whom the faculty of authenticating relics has been granted by apostolic indult (c. 1283, 1).
- b) Without a special mandate a Vicar General cannot authenticate a relic, even if there is merely question of authenticating a relic taken from a relic already duly authenticated, or of issuing a new certificate of authenticity, or of placing a seal upon an authenticated relic (c. 1283, 2; CODE COMM.: JULY 17, 1933).
  - c) Local Ordinaries shall prudently withdraw from public veneration any relic which they know is certainly not authentic (c. 1284).
  - d) If the documents of their authenticity have been lost as a result of civil disturbance or some other mishap, sacred relics shall not be exposed for public veneration without the express approval of the local Ordinary; this approval cannot be given by the Vicar General without a special mandate (c. 1285, 1).
  - e) What is stated above (d), does not apply to ancient relics. These shall be venerated in the same way as heretofore, unless for reasons that are certain it is evident that the relics are false or supposititious (c. 1285,2).
  - f) Local Ordinaries shall not permit questions regarding the authenticity of sacred relics to be agitated, when they rest on mere conjectures, prejudices, or only probable arguments; this is particularly to be observed if the language is derisive or contemptuous, or if the questions are raised in sermons or in books, newspapers, or periodicals intended to foster piety (c. 1286).
  - g) Whoever makes false relics or whoever knowingly sells or distributes or exposes false relics for public veneration, incurs *ipso facto* an excommunication reserved to the Ordinary (c. 2326).

### **169. Care and Custody of Relics.**

- a) A *distinguished relic* cannot be validly alienated or permanently transferred to another church without the permission of the Holy See; this ruling also holds for any relic which belongs to a particular church and is an object of great veneration on the part of the faithful (c. 1281, 1).
- b) A *distinguished relic* of a Saint or of one beatified cannot be kept in a private home or in a private oratory without the express leave of the local Ordinary. If a sacred relic is not distinguished, it may be kept in a private home and be piously worn by the faithful, though it shall always be treated with due honor (c. 1282,1-2).
- c) The following relics of the Saints and of the Blessed are to be considered **distinguished relics** in the sense of the word as used above (a-b):  
*The body: the head; the arm; the forearm; the heart; the tongue; the hand; the leg; that part of the body in which a Martyr suffered, provided that it is entire and not small* (c.1281,2).
- d) If the pectoral cross of a Bishop contains a relic of the true Cross, the relic passes at his death to the cathedral church and shall be transmitted to his successor. If the deceased was Bishop over more than one diocese at the time of his death, the relic passes to the cathedral church of the diocese in which he died; if he did not die in the territory of any of his dioceses, the relic passes to the cathedral church of that one of his dioceses in which he last was (c. 1288).
- e) It is an impious thing to sell sacred relics. Great care shall therefore be taken lest sacred relics and especially relics of the true Cross come into the possession of non-Catholics or lest such relics be sold on the occasion especially of the disposal of inheritances and of the alienation of property wholesale; this is the responsibility of local Ordinaries, vicars forane, and all others having the care of souls (c. 1289, 1). Concerning the prohibition to buy a sacred relic under any pretext whatever, see Cong. Indulg. et Reliq.: Deer. 443 of Dec. 21, 1878 (THBOL. MOB.: i, N. 413 AD 3, NOTE 2).
- f) Rectors of churches and others whom it concerns shall be most vigilant lest the sacred relics committed to their care be in any way profaned, or be destroyed through the carelessness of others, or be kept in an unbecoming manner (c. 1289, 2).
- g) Concerning the proper custody of relic collections belonging to cathedral and other large churches, see

Eph. Lit.: LIV, pp. 24-28.

**170. Relics of the Cross.**

What is here said in regard to relics of the true Cross is to be understood as applying to any authentic relic of the Passion (S.R.C. 3966).

b) A relic of the Cross may not be exposed for public veneration, if the relic of a Saint is enclosed with it in the same reliquary; the relic of the Cross must be enclosed and sealed in its own proper reliquary (c. 1287, 2).

c) A relic of the Cross may not be exposed for public veneration on or in front of the Blessed Sacrament tabernacle, any custom to the contrary notwithstanding (S.B.C. 2740, i; 2906). Neither is it fitting to expose such a relic between the altar candlesticks, the proper place being the middle of the altar in front of the crucifix (EPH. LIT.: LIV, P. 42 AD 5). But if neither the middle of the main altar nor the middle of a side altar can be used because of the Blessed Sacrament tabernacle in the one case and the inconvenient location of the altar in the other, the exposition may be held on a table covered with a white cloth and placed inside the sanctuary.

d) It is not forbidden to expose a relic of the Cross on an elevated stand. Nor is it forbidden to expose such a relic under a canopy or to carry it under a canopy in procession, provided that the use of a canopy is sanctioned by long-standing custom and that the relic of a Saint is not exposed or carried with the relic of the Cross, even in a separate reliquary (S.B.C. 2647; 2854).

e) If a relic of the Cross is exposed in an ostensorium, the latter should be clearly distinguishable from the Blessed Sacrament monstrance by its size, shape, and ornamentation. The reliquary containing the relic and the ostensorium are brought out beforehand to the place where the exposition is to be; but up to the time of the exposition the ostensorium and the reliquary should be covered with a red veil (DB CABPO MORBTTI: N. 2008).

f) For the exposition of a relic of the Cross there shall be at least four lighted candles on the altar or table of exposition. If Mass is said before the exposed relic, these four candles are required in addition to those required for the Mass (see n. 155 k, m).

g) To expose a relic of the Cross, a priest wears surplice and stole with or without a cope. If the exposition is merely for the sake of a solemn procession or is to be preceded by a solemn procession, the celebrant comes to the place of exposition in amice, alb, cincture, stole, and cope; the sacred ministers are vested in amice, alb, cincture, dalmatic, and tunic. A humeral veil is not used by the celebrant, except while blessing the faithful with the relic at the end of the exposition and while carrying the relic in procession. The color of the vestments is red, except that black may be used on Good Friday where this is customary (S.H.C. 2769, x AD 2; 2854; 3256; DB CARPO-MOKBTTI: N. 2010).

h) To expose a relic of the Cross, a priest should, if possible, be assisted by a thurifer and by two acolytes with lighted candles. On coming to the place of exposition, the priest removes his biretta, hands it to the first acolyte, makes a profound bow of the head to the veiled relic on the altar or table, and kneels for a brief moment in prayer. He then rises, goes up to the altar or table, unveils and exposes the ostensorium with the relic, makes a simple genuflection to the exposed relic, descends, and (remaining standing) puts incense into the thurible with the customary blessing. The incensation follows as explained in the following paragraph.

i) A relic of the Cross is always incensed with three double swings and in a standing position, even on Good Friday; a profound bow of the head is made before and after the incensation (S.R.C. 2324, ii; 2769, x AD I; 2854).

j) The following are the times when a relic of the Cross shall be incensed: after it has been exposed; before it is taken up to be carried in procession; before blessing the faithful with it at the close of an exposition. During a procession it may be incensed continuously by two thurifers (S.H.C. 2854). At solemn Mass or Vespers in presence of an exposed relic of the Cross, the latter is incensed with the altar crucifix and not with a distinct incensation (S.K.C. 4026, i).

k) During a procession with a relic of the Cross all shall walk with uncovered head, whether they are wearing a sacred vestment or not and whether they are inside or outside the church (n. 132 g).

l) During exposition of a relic of the Cross the biretta is worn as usual by clerics saying Office in choir

(S.R.C. 2722, ii).

m) Anyone passing in front of a relic of the Cross exposed shall make a simple genuflection (S.R.C. 2390, vii; 2722, ii; 2747; 2854). This shall also be observed at Mass and Vespers by the celebrant and his assistants: on arriving at the altar from the sacristy and on leaving the altar for the sacristy; on leaving the middle of the altar for the bench and on returning; when passing the middle of the altar during the incensations (S.R.C. 2722, i; 2854; 3966). It is to be noted however, that all special genuflections to the relic are omitted if the Blessed Sacrament is reserved at the same altar.

n) Whenever a priest is publicly blessing the faithful with a relic of the Cross, he shall do so in silence (S.R.C. 2722, iii; 2854).

o) A priest may offer a relic of the Cross to the faithful to kiss, without having to expose it on the altar (S.R.C. 2769, x AD 4). He shall wear a surplice and red stole, unless he has just celebrated a low Mass in which case he may remain at the altar and merely lays aside his maniple (S.B.C. 2704, v). In presenting the relic to be kissed, he may pronounce some such formula as: *Per Crucern et Passionern suam liberet te Christus ab omni malo* (DB CAKPO-MOHBTTI: N. 2019).

p) While a relic of the Cross is on the altar before or after exposition or in its usual place in the sacristy, those passing before it shall reverence it with a profound bow of the head (S.B.C. 2324, m; 2854).

Official document of the International Center for Holy Relics **171. *Relics of the Saints***. Relics of the Beatified may not be venerated publicly in churches or carried in processions without a special indult of the Holy See; but this indult is to be considered included in the indult to celebrate in a particular church the Office and Mass of a *Beatus* (c. 1287, 3).

b) To be publicly venerated, relics of the Saints or of the Beatified must be bodily relics or objects which have been sanctified by close contact during life with the person of the Saint or the *Beatus*, as e.g. garments or instruments of martyrdom. Exudations from their bones or objects which have been touched to their bodily relics or to the place of their burial may not be venerated publicly (EPH. LIT.: LIV, p. 41 AD 2; DB CABPO-MOHBTTI: N. 1979).

c) Bodily relics may be either simple or distinguished; concerning the latter, see n.169 c.

d) To be publicly venerated, relics of the Saints or of the Beatified must be enclosed and sealed in a reliquary or case (c. 1287, 1); the reliquary or case may contain relics of a number of Saints, but not a relic of the Cross (c. 1287, 2; N. 170 B).

e) It is forbidden to expose the relic of a Saint on or in front of the Blessed Sacrament tabernacle, and every contrary custom must be eliminated (S.B.C. 2613, vi; 2740, i; 2906; SEE NN. 147 M-N; 170 c).

f) It is forbidden to expose the relic of a Saint on an altar where the Blessed Sacrament is also exposed (S.B.C. 2365, i). If the relic is exposed on the altar on the occasion of the feast of the Saint, it is not allowed to have even exposition with the ciborium on the same altar, unless the relic is removed or at least veiled (S.B.C. 2779; EPH. LIT.: LIV, p. 42 AD 7). But the exposition of the relic need not be discontinued, if the Blessed Sacrament is exposed at another altar; in this case) however) the kissing of the relic and blessing of the faithful with it shall be omitted, as long as the Blessed Sacrament remains exposed (S.B.C. 4059, ii). Neither is it strictly necessary to discontinue the exposition of relics between the candlesticks, if the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is to be of short duration (EPH. LIT.: LVI, P. 137 AD 6).

g) It is forbidden to place a pall under the relic of a Saint, when exposed (S.B.C. 2689, in; SEE N. 140 F).

h) It is not forbidden to expose the relic of a Saint on an elevated stand; but this should not be the stand on which the Blessed Sacrament is usually exposed or one intended for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It is however under all circumstances strictly forbidden to expose the relic of a Saint under a canopy or to carry such a relic under a canopy in procession (S.B.C. 2647; 2854; 2951, i; DB CABPO-MOBETTI: N. 1991; SEE NN. 164 A; 170 D).

i) If a relic of a Saint is exposed in an ostensorium, the latter should be at once distinguishable from the Blessed Sacrament monstrance by its size, shape, and ornamentation (S.B.C. 3697, xiv; S.L.: iv, QTJ, 365 AD ii; EPH. LIT.: LIV, P. 151) ; see relic-ostensorium in altar illustration near the beginning of the Missal. The reliquary containing the relic and the ostensorium are brought out beforehand to the place where the exposition is to be; but up to the time of the exposition the ostensorium and the reliquary should be covered with a veil which shall be red for a Martyr but otherwise white (DE CARPO-MOBETTI: N. 1990).

j) For the exposition of a relic of a Saint or a *Beatus* there shall be at least two lighted candles on the altar or the table of exposition; this shall be observed, even when relics are exposed between the altar-candlesticks on feast days. If Mass is said before the exposed relic, these two candles are required in addition to the candles required for the Mass (S.B.C. 2067, ix; 3029, xiii; 3204; EPH. LIT.: LIV, P. 41, NOTE 15; P. 101 AD 9; SEE N. 155 L-M).

k) To expose a relic of a Saint, a priest wears surplice and stole. If the exposition is merely for the sake of a solemn procession or is to be preceded by a solemn procession, the celebrant comes to the place of exposition in amice, alb, cincture, stole, and cope; the sacred ministers are vested in amice, alb, cincture, dalmatic, and tunic. A humeral veil is not used by the celebrant, even while blessing the faithful with the relic at the end of the exposition or while carrying the relic in procession. The color of the vestments is red for a Martyr, but otherwise white (B.B. : x, c. xiv; DB CABPO-MOBETTI: NN. 1992-1993).

l) In exposing a relic of a Saint, the priest should, if possible, be assisted by two acolytes with lighted candles and, if the relic is to be incensed, by a thurifer also. On coming to the place of exposition, the priest removes his biretta, hands it to the first acolyte, makes a slight bow of the head to the veiled relic on the altar or table, unveils and exposes the ostensorium with the relic, makes a slight bow of the head to the exposed relic, and descends. If the relic is to be incensed, he remains standing and puts incense into the thurible with the customary blessing; the incensation follows as explained in the following paragraph.

m) The relic of a Saint is always incensed with two double swings and in a standing position; a slight bow of the head is made before and after the incensation (S.B.C. 2535; DB CABPO-MOBETTI: N. 1992).

n) The incensation of a relic of a Saint is not prescribed outside of Mass and Vespers when solemnly celebrated. It is allowed nevertheless at the following times: after the relic has been exposed; before it is taken up to be carried in procession; before blessing the faithful with it at the close of an exposition. During a procession the relic may be incensed continuously and, if it is a distinguished relic, by two thurifers (N. 169 c; DB CAHPO-MORBTTI: N. 1994).

o) Relics of the Saints placed between the candlesticks of the altar on solemn feasts are incensed at solemn Mass and Vespers as explained in n. 165 a-b.

p) Those who carry the relic of a Saint in procession must under all circumstances walk with uncovered head. If the relic is carried by the celebrant alone, the sacred ministers shall also remove their birettas (n. 132 k).

q) If a blessing is given with a relic of a Saint after it has been exposed, all shall kneel, even Canons; but the giving of the blessing at the close of an exposition is not obligatory (S.B.C. 1711, i; 2483, v; 4243, vn).

r) In publicly presenting to the faithful a relic of a Saint to be kissed, a priest shall wear surplice and stole; but if he has just celebrated Mass and does not first retire to the sacristy, he merely lays aside the maniple. In presenting the relic, he may pronounce some such blessing as: *Per merita et intercessionem Sancti N concedat tibi Dnus salutem et pacern* (S.R.C. 2704; v; S.L.: iv, QTJ. 365 AD v).

s) Concerning the relics to be placed in the sepulcher of an altar, see n. 9 d-g and n. 61 a-c (fixed altar) and n. 73 a-b (sacred stone).

**172. Feast of a Distinguished Relic.** If a church or a public or semi-public oratory possesses a distinguished relic of a Saint, it has by law the privilege of celebrating in the Office and Mass the feast of the Saint on the day assigned in the Roman Martyrology. The use of the privilege is not obligatory, unless the feast has already been introduced and is sanctioned by custom or unless the relic is kept in a church or oratory of a religious institute of which the Saint is a member (S.K.C. 4317, i).

b) Under penalty of not satisfying one's obligation to the divine Office the above privilege cannot be used except under the following conditions: the Saint must be named in the Roman Martyrology; the relic must be a distinguished relic as explained in n. 169 c; it must be entire and not mutilated; and it must be duly authenticated as truly belonging to the Saint in question (B.B.: ADD., n AD 2 E; S.B.C. 361, ii; 460, ii-iii; 555; 853; 1234, i; 1334, ii-iii; 1460; 1603. i-iii; 1670; 1722; 1815, ill; 1853; 2180, ii; 2228; 4317, i).

c) An exposition of the relic is not required, in order to celebrate the feast of the relic (S.H.C. 4186, ii; S.L.F.: ii, N. 198).

d) The feast is celebrated under minor double rite, unless for another reason the church or oratory must celebrate the feast on that day under a higher rite. If the relic is kept in a church or oratory of a religious

institute of which the Saint is a member, the feast is celebrated as a second class double. The Office is said by the clergy strictly attached to the service of the church, the Mass by any priest celebrating in the church on that day (S.K.C. 4317, i; S.L.P.: ii, N. 198).

e) The feast has the character of a strictly proper feast of the church. Other things being equal, it is therefore to be preferred in occurrence and in the order of reposition and transfer and commemoration to a feast of the universal Church with the exception of a Sunday and of a privileged vigil or feria or octave; in concurrence, it is not preferred to a feast of the universal Church, other things being equal (B.B.: ADD., ii AD 2 B) .

f) If perpetually impeded by a feast of higher rank, the feast of a relic is transferred to the first free day following (B.B.: ABD., V, 1).

g) If no special Office is assigned for the feast in the Breviary, the Office is taken from the appropriate Common. If the feast is of minor double rite, the antiphons and psalms at all the Hours and the verse for each Nocturn are taken from the current ferial day in the Psalter, while the Lessons of the I Nocturn are from the occurring Scriptures according to the rubrics.

h) If no special Mass is assigned for the feast in the Missal, the Mass is taken from the appropriate Common. Concerning the *Credo*, see n. 228 a ad 7.

i) If the feast is a second class double and if the Saint is named in the calendar with a companion Saint, the two Saints are not separated, provided that they are related by ties of consanguinity or affinity; otherwise, the companion Saint must be transferred or commemorated or omitted, according to the rubrics. If the feast is of minor double rite and if the Saint is named in the calendar with a companion Saint, the two Saints are not separated, provided that the feast of the companion Saint is of minor double rite. Neither are the two Saints separated if the feast of the companion Saint is of simple rite in the calendar, provided that the two Saints are related by ties of consanguinity or affinity or that they died in the same place and at the same time and for the same reason; otherwise, the feast of simple rite can only be commemorated in the Office and Mass of the feast of the relic, according to the rubrics. In all cases where the Saint of the relic and the companion Saint are not separated, the name of the former must be mentioned first in the oration; the same precedence is followed in the Lessons of the II Nocturn, if the history of each Saint is recorded in the Breviary separately (B.B.: ADD., ix, 4-5; IN NOV. BUBB.: P. 140).

j) If a feast of the Holy Relics has been granted by the Holy See to a diocese or religious institute, it shall be observed by all who follow the calendar of the diocese or institute, even in churches and oratories which do not possess a distinguished relic. The Office and Mass of this feast are proper, and the color is red (S.B.C. 2492; 4314).

k) Though a common feast of the Holy Relics must be celebrated as explained in the preceding paragraph, it does not supplant the privilege of a special feast given by law to an individual church by reason of its possession of a distinguished relic. Neither does the obligation to celebrate a common feast abrogate a particular indult whereby one feast is given to an individual church in honor of all the Holy Relics which it possesses (EPH. LIT.: xii, p. 277 AD 2; LVI, p. 177).