

# **RELICS & ICONS THEIR ROLE IN HEALING, CONVERSIONS AND MIRACLES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout the centuries people have recognized the healing and mystical power of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ, Saints, Martyrs, and other Holy people associated with the development of Christianity since it began over two-thousand years ago. Since then, and up into the current year of this writing (2021), many people speak of and bear witness to the spiritual and physical healings, miracles, and religious conversions that have taken place through the intercession of Saints, Martyrs, or artifacts associated with these Holy people – especially those of relics and icons. This paper will explore the recent claims of spiritual and physical healings, miracles, and religious conversions of members, parishioners, laity and clergy from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. It should be known up front that the members (parishioners, laity and clergy) seek the intercession of the Saints and Martyrs through God only, and therefore, are not seeking the help of Saints and Martyrs alone. Additionally, not all who have experienced a positive change or improvement in their sense of wellbeing, health or spirituality were members of either church at time of the improvement or desired outcome, as we shall see. To develop a greater understanding of the claims or good fortune that followed thereafter, I have chosen to reach out to church members from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches located in northeastern Pennsylvania. The members, having prayed to include Saints or Martyrs in their prayers in the hopes of their intercession, had volunteered to be interviewed, and described their experiences which I have provided in this paper. Some of the interviewees (or people they speak of) had come into contact with the relics or icons associated with the Saints, Martyrs and other Holy people. Therefore, it was either through direct contact with the relics and icons, prayer, or a combination of activity that they claim resulted in a positive outcome, change, cure, miracle or religious conversion.

**Table of Contents**

Introduction..... 3

Historic Background ..... 4

Literature Review..... 10

*Alexandra Walsham on Relics and Remains* ..... 10

*Clifford Geertz on The Interpretation of Cultures*..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

*Victor and Edith Turner on Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture***Error! Bookmark not defined.**

*Veneration of Holy Relics* ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

*Authenticity* ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

*The Process of Sainthood in Stages*..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**6

*Nomenclature*..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

*Roman Catholic Discussion*..... 19

*Eastern Orthodox Discussion* ..... 21

*Icons*..... 24

Research Question ..... 28

Methodology ..... 29

*Participant Observation (Informal Interviews)* ..... 29

Ethnography ..... 30

Anthropological Analysis ..... 210

*Glenn Hinson* ..... 210

*Clifford Geertz* ..... 214

*Victor and Edith Turner*..... 216

Theological Analysis ..... 219

*Physical Healing Discussion* ..... 222

*Spiritual Healing Discussion* ..... 228

*Conversions Discussion*..... 230

*Miracles Discussion*..... 232

Recommmendations for Future Study..... 235

Conclusion ..... 236

Bibliography ..... 237

Figures and Photographs..... 241

**INTRODUCTION**

One only had to watch the lines of crowds heading into St Mary Magdalen church in Honesdale, PA in November, 2009 during a special viewing of one of Mary Magdalen's relics to detect a glimpse of interest in holy relics by the general public – albeit, often the mass media depicts the relics and their history behind them with both truth and inaccuracies. Aside from media coverage, the lines of the faithful patiently waiting to see the forearm of the Saint, had lasted for days. It was a miracle that the tour even began at this little Roman Catholic church in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, since the relic had come dangerously close to be being destroyed during an eleventh century Muslim invasion of France, and later on during the break out of riots that occurred during the French Revolution. For many Christians alike, it was a miracle the reliquary, located in the grotto of St Baume, allowed the relic to leave France and this was only the second time in history for the relic to escape the French borders. Others who attended the event also witnessed miracles – the conversions of others to a new faith as they came into direct contact with the relic of Mary Magdalen.

Many authors have contributed to what we currently know about relics. Theologians and collectors have reported on the function of relics, their associations in biblical history and their significance in the spread of Christianity. Many of the relics, therefore, are associated with specific people that joins the saint, martyr, or confessor to specific historic events associated with the history of Christianity. But Christianity is not alone in the veneration of Saints and relics. Other religions have also venerated relics associated with their beliefs through history. For example, a couple of hair fragments from the prophet, Mohammed is safely secured in a dome-like reliquary in Mecca, adjacent to the actual “Dome of the Rock.” But that is not all. In Brookline, Massachusetts – just outside of Boston, there exists a Siddha Yoga ashram dedicated to the Siddha lineage Saint, Baba

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Muktananda who is known for his writings, *The Secret of the Siddhas*, a published book that describes the basic tenets of Kashmir Shaivism. After his passing in 1982, the saint's shoes had been carefully preserved and housed at the Ashram for followers to venerate. Keeping close therefore, to those who are regarded as holy, endowed with healing power, and are viewed as close to God, is a necessity for many people.

### **Historic Background**

The veneration of relics is not a new story and throughout history, there have been many attempts - some successful - others not so much, to find the Saints and Apostles of Christ that early Christians had secreted away during times of Roman persecution. Helena, the mother of Constantine for example, traveled to Palestine and Jerusalem between 326 and 328 A.D. to search for relics associated with the crucifixion of Christ. Not knowing exactly where to begin the search for relics associated with the passion of Christ, stories abound with Helena's approach from the divine inspiration she received from God, to talking with local informants leading her to discover them hidden away.

Joan Carroll Cruz's book *Relics, What They Are and Why They Matter* addresses issues and questions raised by historic theologians. It had been rumored that the True Cross was hidden in the Holy Sepulcher, which had been covered with a mound of dirt and further concealed by the Jews by the placement of various pagan buildings in an effort to discourage Christian worship. Slightly different versions of the findings have come down to us (Cruz, 2015: 61). Tradition also reports Helena had discovered three crosses, and nails from the true cross at the site of the Holy Sepulcher where Jesus was placed in the tomb, which at that point was covered by a pagan shrine. To test the authenticity of the true cross, a woman that

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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was close to death had touched two of the crosses, yet her condition remained unchanged. Upon touching the third cross, the woman was healed and restored to health. Other accounts describe the restoration of life to a dead man that was touched by the cross. The relics Helena encountered were supposedly distributed to sites across Rome and Constantinople including fragments of wood from the original crucifixion cross. While historians argue that enough relics claiming to contain pieces of “True Cross” have been found to build a fortress, it is also interesting to note that the original True Cross was reported not to have been affected by the taking of samples. St Paulinus of Nola (ca 353-431 AD) in one of his letters refers to the fact that no matter how many pieces were removed from the cross, it grew no smaller in size. This has been likened to the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes at the feeding of the five thousand (Cruz, 2015: 63).

We can find evidence that such artifacts as relics existed when we turn to the scriptures – those scriptures found in both the Old and New Testaments. Those artifacts and how they played a role in the passion of Christ were described throughout the Gospels. For example, we can look to the dialogue occurring between the apostles that took place shortly after learning Jesus had risen, in John 20:25. “So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” Thus, Thomas was doubtful, but he wanted to see for himself – to be witness to the miracle. Like Thomas, many Christians who followed after Christ also wanted to see something tangible that could connect them with the Christ and those who emulated Christ – the Apostles, the Martyrs, and Saints. It would not be hard to imagine that the followers of Jesus Christ, being convinced that He was the Son of God, kept and honored all material objects

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

that He had used during His life and those of His mother, and that they revered those objects that were used during his Passion. It would not be unreasonable to believe that these were faithfully guarded and passed with care from one generation to another (Cruz, 2015:6).

However, relics were not always genuine, nor original and because some unscrupulous characters with opportunist motives found prospects for financial gain, some relics were manufactured locally and artificially, and were sold to unknowing pilgrims during their journeys to the pilgrimage sites. Furthermore, some clergy disapproved of the veneration of relics. Gregory the Great for a time expressed displeasure with the interference, dismemberment or the removal of the remains of the honored dead from one place to another, although he offered to send the Empress Constantina some filings from Saint Peter's chains, a type of gift often mentioned in his writings (Cruz, 2015, 5).

Other objects associated with the passion were searched for as well including the Holy Lance that pierced the side of Christ, the crown of thorns (referred to as *Euphorbia milii*) placed on the head of Jesus, Veronica's Veil, and even the burial shroud. As the tombs of such notable early Christian leaders were encountered or discovered, churches were built over the sites to protect them, to keep them Holy, and provide power and prestige to the sites of pilgrimages that many flocked to. It would also prove to provide an important source of revenue for the church over the course of time. Moreover, churches would at least afford some protection against those seeking to possess the icons and relics for personal gain.

In *A History of Private Life, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, scholars take a closer look at the daily life of people located around Byzantium. People began to seek out items of sacred value and liturgical objects for private devotion. This was certainly true of various

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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icons and reliquaries, and of crosses and medallions bearing images of the saints that were worn around the neck. Icons played an important role in personal piety as they did in public religion. These strictly regulated and widely reproduced images drew upon the dogma of the incarnation and charisma of the saints (Aries and Duby, 1987: 634). By 324 A.D., Emperor Constantine was hastily moving relics to Byzantium, where he patterned the social and political of life of Constantinople after Rome. After dedicating the new city to God, he began overseeing the construction of Christian churches. Relics retrieved from the catacombs were then housed in beautiful reliquaries in order to be venerated by the growing Christian population. Furthermore, the remains of three Apostles were moved to Constantinople for such purposes – that of Timothy, Andrew, and Luke.

When the Second Council of Nicaea met in 787 A.D., at the Church of Hagia Sophia, the purpose was to restore the veneration and use of holy icons which had been suppressed earlier, by Leo III. The Second Council of Nicaea made it clear that relics were welcomed back into the mystique of Christianity – that they could be fully venerated by the faithful, and furthermore, made to become a permanent fixture of any new churches erected, as directed under Canon vii which reads, *Relics are to be placed in all churches: no church is to be consecrated without relics* (Catholic Encyclopedia: 2021).

The Council of Trent, which met in 1653, further approved the veneration of Holy bodies by the faithful. However, the Council also called for the abolishment of superstition surrounding the icons and relics. For example, the twenty-fifth session reaffirmed it is not the relic of the Saint that is powerful itself, nor is it the Saint alone that the faithful pray to. It is through God only that the Saints intercede for the faithful. The faithful seek the help by asking the Saint to pray for us. Hence, the Novena – where prayers are prayed by the faithful

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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for nine consecutive days in the hopes that God will provide the help or grace one is requesting. So, as it is with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, parishioners do not worship the relics. They venerate the relics of the Saints because of the way the Saints demonstrated their love for others and their love for Christ. How the Saints lived their lives became an inspiration to both religions.

So, it was clear, as demonstrated by the Council, that not all of the pilgrims had a clear understanding of the relics. And yet, some still believed evil forces were responsible for their woes, and had treated the relics as amulets, where they would call upon the Saint to protect them from evil, or to repel bad luck, disease or danger. Gary Varner's text, *The History & Use of Amulets, Charms and Talismans* describes how religious medals were treated more like amulets, rather than prayers in metal. Other Christian amulets include the many saint's medals of the Catholic church such as the St Christopher's medal. While the St. Christopher medal is worn to protect people on their travels, others, such as St Anthony of Padua and St. Roch, were worn to protect cattle from witchcraft and people from the plague (Varner, 2008: 169-170). Viewed anthropologically, one could attribute belief in the protective power of amulets as apotropaic, whereby bad luck, misfortune or disease is repelled by the amulets.

But the confusion would continue for centuries. To find some of the strongest opposition to belief in relics, we have to look back to the time of the Protestant Reformation, where we find arguments presented by John Calvin in 1543. He asserted that fake relics had been traded since Augustine's lifetime, and that their number had increased as the world inevitably became more corrupt. Calvin proposed to abandon the veneration of relics, citing God's hiding of Moses' burial place in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy (34:6).

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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According to Calvin, the body of Moses was concealed to keep the Israelites from falling into idolatry. So, it is here in Calvin's *Treatise on Relics* that he equates the veneration of relics with idolatry which is forbidden by God. He then asks the reader "Were they not left in peace, with the remains of all other saints? But what is more conclusive, was not the body of Moses concealed by God's will, in such a manner that it never has been or can be discovered? It is generally admitted that God wished to put away from his people of Israel all temptation to commit idolatry..." (Calvin's *Treatise on Relics*, 1543).

During the English Reformation, Holy relics came under attack again, but this time from the royal commissioners and Thomas Cromwell. Some of these items were sent down to the tower of London or ended up in Cromwell's wardrobe of beds in Westminster; others were smashed or burnt on the spot in compelling spectacles of desacralization (Walsham, 2010: 122). To the Protestants, the veneration of relics was in direct violation of God's first commandment, as well as a prolonged vestige of paganism. But as much as Protestants ransacked and destroyed the reliquaries, leaving remains of the relics and bodies of Saints recklessly scattered in open view, Catholics were only too quick to salvage the artifacts and many of the personal items and body parts of the Saints were quickly retrieved and collected for safe keeping until such a time when Catholicism was restored to a safer status.

Interestingly, it was the Protestants who began collecting items associated with Protestant victims during the reign of Mary I. But unlike the Catholics, Protestants claimed they were not collecting the remains to foster relic veneration, but to instill remembrance or a memorial to the victim and to honor those who died for their belief. The Catholics in turn, accused the Protestants of practicing Thaumaturgy – a practice thought to include the use of magic to perform miracles and acts of necromancy – where charges were made against those

resorting to using the bones of Marian martyrs. John Dee, the famous occultist and mathematician was one accused of using human remains for occult activity during this time.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Alexandra Walsham***

In the Introduction of *Relics and Remains (Past and Present Supplement 5 2010)*, Alexandra Walsham provides a brief description of Holy relics without referring to a complete explanation, as described by the Roman Catholic Church. Walsham, does however, clearly and accurately define a relic as part of the whole – a remnant of the complete Holy being. The author also defines the power of the icon which she describes having equal Holy power.

A relic is ontologically different from a representation or image: it is not a mere symbol or indicator of divine presence, it is an actual physical embodiment of it, each particle encapsulating the essence of the departed person, pars pro toto, in its entirety. In practice, however, the lines dividing them have often been equally permeable. In ancient Byzantium and modern Eastern Orthodox cultures, icons function in much the same way as relics, while within the western Christian tradition pictures and statues that bleed, sweat, or shed tears exemplify the ease with which images can make the transition from signifier to sacred object in their own right (Walsham, 2010: 12).

Walsham views relics as living connections to history – as remnants and “left-over traditions” handed down from history, serving as a type of memorial that is in danger of vanishing. Walsham goes on to beautifully describe relics as “spiritual electrodes” that send sacred energy to a temporal sphere. Their power is inherent, which is unlike the amulets that are invested with energy through human ritual. Walsham views the relics as charismatic – that is, they have the ability to stimulate veneration where believers may be inspired to “transform” their lives. It is interesting to note that Walsham describes relics as products of cultures that venerate them - a type of reflection of the society that holds them in great

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

esteem. Walsham's own chapter, *Skeletons in the Cupboard: Relics after the English Reformation* is a fascinating account of the Protestant view of Catholic relics during the sixteenth century. Although Walsham presents the reader with an historical account of the Protestant view of relics and sacred objects, the author also explains how Protestant hypocrisy led to a renewed interest in relics, but the renewed interest was a secularized curiosity that transformed religious or sacred objects into artifacts of curiosity. What Walsham does not discuss in her chapter is how the Holy relics associated with Saints and Martyrs were instrumental in helping the faithful to seek spiritual and physical healing, nor does her chapter describe how the lives of the faithful were changed as a result of that healing through relics.

The remainder of the Introduction to this volume describes the contributions of the co-authors and contributors. Paul Gillingham point out in his chapter how very little work was previously committed to the study of relics, except those of the Catholic relic hagiographies and the Protestant reactions provided by Voltaire and Calvin – referring to them as superstitions. However, as Walsham describes, she does view a renewed interest in relics. The renewal of interest in relics that has emerged within the last thirty years and is now on the cusp of reaching maturity may be attributed in large part to the cross-fertilization of theology and ecclesiastical history with the disciplines of religious sociology and cultural anthropology (Walsham, 2021: 16). Caroline Walker Bynum discusses the attitude of the remains of Saints and their dismemberment during the medieval period. The remaining titles are enlightening and informative but none of the remaining chapters provide any new information on relics of saints or icons associated with Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. None of the chapters include any revelation on how the relics from the two world

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

religions personally impact their members or parishioners, whether it is spiritual healing, physical healing, miracles or conversions. Such a study is gravely lacking in the anthropology discipline.

### **Clifford Geertz**

Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, searches to define religion through a cultural lens in an attempt to advance the study of religion anthropologically, by widening the established traditions used in the past. He views them (Malinowski's attempt to distinguish between common sense and religion; Durkheim's discussion of the sacred, and *Verstehenden* of Weber) as good starting points but wants to move beyond them, placing them in a wider context. This leads Geertz to explore the "cultural dimension of religious analysis" which places his culture concept as symbols that were transmitted historically – a system used to express forms by which people communicate. "It denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1997: 95). Geertz's symbolic system is discussed in more detail later.

### **Victor & Edith Turner**

In Victor and Edith Turner's *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, the main premise of their work in this ethnography focuses on the symbolic aspects and the images that support the pilgrimages and those who partake in them. It also takes a look at the original folk traditions that assist in helping the faithful pilgrims to better comprehend its meaning. The text also considers the theological and traditional folk customs that assist the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

worshippers in order to grip the meaning behind the pilgrimages. The Turners view the experiences as clothed in images and symbols. What can be found in this ethnography is their observations on icons and relics, albeit, is limited in analysis in terms of the ability of these artifacts to affect miraculous cures for countless maladies. The Turners look to the witnessed visions of Mary, mother of Jesus by Saint Bernadette and Juan Diego. The Turners, however, see the Vatican's reaction of the vision as more representative of folk story, rather than a story based in reality. "We believe that its slow progress must reflect a prevalent view in the Vatican that Juan Diego's role in the foundation narrative of Guadalupe is more suggestive of structural and mythical relations than of historical events" (Turner and Turner, 1978:92). A discussion of icons and relics by the Turners is also provided but this limited discussion does not exclusively lend any new insightful analysis related to the healings and miracles that are thought to be associated with such artifacts. A greater discussion of Victor and Edith Turner will be covered in the Anthropological Analysis section of this paper.

### **Veneration of Holy Relics**

Those I have interviewed include parishioners and clergy from the Roman Catholic and Eastern orthodox faiths. Having been one faith in the early church, the two separate faiths do share beliefs in some of the Saints that both have come to venerate. Both churches refer to Prophet Elisha's remains (2 Kings 13:21) "Once some people were burying a man, when suddenly they saw such a raiding band. So they cast the man into the grave of Elisha, and everyone went off. But when the man came in contact with the bones of Elisha, he came back to life and got to his feet." In Acts 19, 11-12, one can also see how people - believers in the risen Christ and his Apostles were already beginning to venerate artifacts they viewed

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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had a direct connection to people with holy power. “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.” And again, in Acts 5:14-16, the shadow of an Apostle alone that fell upon the sick was also believed to be instrumental in causing a cure for both illness and demonic possession.

“Yet, more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus, they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.”

It is here where one can begin to see a division becoming more evident between those who stayed faithful to the Jewish religion, and those who were separating themselves from it. Unlike the Jewish tradition, where the mortal remains of humans were looked upon as unclean and corrupt, the remains of saints and martyrs were viewed as holy and life-saving, and were therefore held in high esteem by Christians. So, veneration of Saints by early Christians began very early during the spread of Christianity. The fact that items dropped, left behind or forgotten by the Apostles were quickly retrieved and treasured by the faithful, makes this clear. Furthermore, Saints were viewed as having direct communication with God. As the Christian population grew, especially among urban areas, Christian organizations began forming.

“In some cities, Christians organized themselves into such funeral societies, and therefore it made sense for them to gather at their cemeteries. But even more importantly, many heroes of the faith were buried there, and Christians believed that communion joined them not only among themselves and with Jesus Christ, but also with their ancestors in faith” (Gonzales, 2010: 110).

By joining a funeral society (organizations that could actually possess property) a better opportunity would be afforded to those where one could share the same space in death.

“Being in the presence of the Saints was likened to sharing a sacred space with them, as if their very presence was vital for their own salvation. To these Christians, the Saints were very much alive to them. The saints were more present to the Church on earth, because the saints lived in the presence of God. The saints were not dead; indeed, they were more alive than the Church on earth (Hahn, 2018: 127).

### **Authenticity**

With the increased interest in relics, their ability to help the faithful, and the rise of new churches all looking to embed the remains of their patron saint in an altar stone, forgeries became problematic for the Roman Catholic church and many of their parishioners. Control of the sale of relics, display for veneration, and the worship of true relics became an issue for the church. Through time, laws or canons would be passed providing the proper guidelines on the recognition of authentic relics. Canon Law had helped to prove the authenticity of the relics so they could be publicly venerated and the laws have been updated several times over the centuries by the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The bottom line is that authentication is required for relics to be publicly venerated and sealed in a reliquary. A reliquary is a Holy container for storing relics for display. The artifact itself must also be accompanied with a certificate of authentication which is signed and sealed by a member of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. In the past, the certificate could be signed by a local bishop where the Saint had resided and carried out his Holy duties. However, under the more recent Canon released in 2017, new instructions clarify older canon. “The instruction details specific steps pertaining to canonical recognition, extraction of fragments and creation of relics, transfer of the urn containing

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

relics, alienation (transfer of ownership) of relics, obtaining the consent of the congregation to perform such procedures, and the steps to follow and personnel necessary for the pilgrimage of relics” (Catholic Courier, 2021). So, it is now the official duty of the Postulator of the Cause to provide an official signature of authentication. The local bishop, however, can sign the certificate in the absence of the Postulator. This can be found in Chapter II, Extraction of Fragments and Creation of Relics, Article 23:

§ 1. It is the right of the Postulator of the Cause to prepare and to sign the certificate of authenticity of the relics.

§ 2. In the absence of the Postulation, it is the right of the diocesan Bishop, of the Eparch, of the one equivalent to him in law, or of his Delegate, to prepare and to sign the certificate of authenticity of the relics. (Congregation for the Causes of Saints, 2017: Line §1-2 (Bartolucci, 2017).

To even begin to understand what Saints and Holy relics literally are, I will provide a description of both from the perspectives of the two entities - the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths.

### ***The Process of Sainthood in Stages***

A Saint is a person (who is deceased) that exhibited a large measure of holiness that is recognized by the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Oriental Orthodox churches, and others for their closeness to God. While, deceased members of the Eastern Orthodox faith are *glorified*, deceased members of the Roman Catholic faith are *canonized*. The veneration of Saints in the Roman Catholic Church requires the deceased person to satisfactorily meet several stages in the canonization process.

### ***The First Stage***

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

The process can be extensive at times among the Roman Catholic tradition, and proof is required that strongly supports the church member lived and died a Holy life. The process begins at the diocesan level five years after the death of the one being investigated. Writings, sermons, speeches, sermons and any testimonials of witnesses are collected. This aides in the drawing up of a biography. The investigation is then assigned a “postulator” for additional investigation and the collection of evidence. It is also at this stage that the remains of the person (called Servant of God at this point) is exhumed, the body examined, and artifacts collected and preserved. Here, parts of the person (skin, bone and hair samples will be collected from the Servant of God.)

### ***Second Stage***

At the second stage, where the deceased person is referred to as “Venerable,” the Pope receives recommendations from the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints to proclaim the Servant of God’s “heroic virtue” where the cardinal values of temperance, prudence, fortitude and justice was exercised by the Servant of God.

### ***Third Stage***

A statement of beatification comes from the church at the third stage if beatification conditions have been met. The deceased is now referred to as “Blessed.” At this stage, if the Blessed is a Martyr, the Pope will make a declaration of Martyrdom declaring that the Martyr willingly gave their life as a heroic act for others, or as a witness to faith. For non-martyrs (referred to as “Confessors”) proof is required where the Confessor performs a miracle such as the curing of a sick patient for which physicians can find no explanation of the cure; the cure is complete, and instantaneous. The curious general public have often looked for descriptions of this process by referring to online sources such as Wikipedia,

although Wikipedia is not often accepted as a reference by most professional researcher scholars.

*“...the occurrence of a miracle through the intercession of the Venerable; that is, that God granted a sign that the person is enjoying the Beatific Vision by performing a miracle for which the Venerable interceded. Presently, these miracles are almost always miraculous cures of infirmity, because these are the easiest to judge given the Church's evidentiary requirements for miracles; e.g., a patient was sick with an illness for which no cure was known; prayers were directed to the Venerable; the patient was cured; the cure was spontaneous, instantaneous, complete, and enduring; and physicians cannot discover any natural explanation for the cure. (Wikipedia, 2021).*

Also at this stage, a Feast Day is assigned or appointed to be observed only at the location of the home diocese of the Blessed. It should be understood that the Feast Day is a liturgical device used by the Church to organize its calendar. A Saint's Feast Day is most often the day the Saint had died. It is intended to be a day of recognition, rather than a fully organized meal or other celebration. However, many members of Catholic faith may actually celebrate the occasion by organizing such an event, especially if the Saint is patronized often by the church member or parishioner.

### ***The Fourth Stage***

At the fourth stage, canonization takes place of the Blessed to become canonized as a Saint, and only if no fewer than two miracles were performed through the intercession of the Blessed following his or her death. For a martyr, only one miracle is required to be reported. If the Apostolic See recognizes the official sanctity of the candidate, then the candidate is canonized where the deceased member is elevated to Saint. At that point, the Saint can be publicly invoked and petitioned for help in Heaven by the living membership of the church. Furthermore, the saint may also be officially mentioned in the liturgy of the church. With canonization, the church is then admitting that the Saint possesses Beatific Vision - direct

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

self-communication with God. The Feast Day is then made universal throughout the Roman Catholic Church.

### ***Nomenclature***

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church each have their own definitions and classes of relics, nomenclature, and processes they use to venerate saints and objects associated with them that become the relics.

### ***Roman Catholic Church Discussion***

Relics are remains of Holy saints, confessors, and martyrs. The word “relic” itself derived from the Latin word, *reliquiae* which translate into “remains” and therefore, may contain components of holy people that were venerated by the Church. “Veneration” itself by definition means to have great respect or reverence for a person or object associated with said person. Reasons for extending such care and respect to the Saint and associated relics are mainly due to the belief in the holiness of the soul of the saint which awaits the reunion with its mortal remains during the resurrection. The Reverend Charles Mangan, provides a similar definition for the word, relic. “A relic is a piece of the body of a saint, an item owned or used by the saint, or an object which has been touched to the tomb of a saint. Traditionally, a piece of the body of a saint, especially that of a martyr, may be with the permission of the local ecclesiastical authority used in solemn processions recalling the specific holy person” (Mangan, 2021: 1). In the midst of collecting and venerating religious relics, they have been placed into set categories assigned by the Roman Catholic Church to one of three classes.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

*First-Class Relics* consist of instruments associated with the passion of Jesus Christ and body parts of saints. For example, in the New Testament, we can read how Jesus of Nazareth was nailed to the cross as part of the Roman crucifixion process. Since then, fragments of the true cross, or the nails the Romans used to nail Jesus to the cross, as well as the holy lance used to pierce the side of Jesus, have been reported to be found. For this reason, the Shroud of Turin and the Veil of Veronica are also considered to be First Class relics as both items are believed to come into direct contact with the body of Jesus either before his crucifixion or during the three-day burial period prior to his rising from the tomb. First Class relics may also consist of the remains of the Holy Saints, or fragments of the same such as bone, hair, and skin fragments. Relics such as these have been highly sought after by both the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church and followers of both.

*Second-Class Relics* consist of sanctified objects that have come into close contact with a Saint. For example, clothing and artifacts associated with the Saint that he or she used in their mortal lifetime. Items such as a glove worn by Saint Padre Pio. If the artifact is associated with a martyr, then the artifact was an instrument used to torture the individual during the scourging or punishment of the Martyr.

*Third-Class Relics* consist of artifacts that have in the past, come into contact with first or second-class relics. For example, these may consist of remnants of clothing that have touched either a first- or second-class relic. For example, a piece of textile that came into contact with an artifact belonging to the Roman Catholic Saint, Kateri Tekakwitha (ca. 1656–1680), whom was a Layperson of the Archdiocese of Montreal, may be considered a third-class relic. Other textiles and cloth fabrics that came into contact with the remains of the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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apostles of Jesus are also regarded as relics and treated with reverence; these are referred to as branded relics.

As my study of the relics of the Saints crossed into the realm of the Eastern Orthodox Church – that is – some of the Saints and their associated relics are also venerated by the Eastern Orthodox Church, I will now discuss the Eastern Orthodox process required to officially venerate significant church members and clergy as Saints. For purposes of this study, I will limit the discussion of the Eastern Orthodox canonization process to the American Canonization Commission only.

### ***Eastern Orthodox Church Discussion***

Saints chosen by the Eastern Orthodox religion do not require the manifestation of miracles during the lifetime of the church member. However, they must demonstrate to have lived a virtuous life, are endowed with recognizable holiness, and the member's writings must be found to be completely of Orthodox Christian tradition during their lifetime. In fact, a member of the Orthodox Church in America's Canonization Commission – Father Joseph Frawley – explicitly describes in his paper, *The Glorification of the Saints in the Orthodox Church*, just whom are recognized as Saints.

His coming (Prophets), and those who proclaimed the Gospel (Apostles and Evangelists). Then those who risked their lives and shed their blood to bear witness to Christ (Martyrs and Confessors) were also recognized by the Church as saints. There was no special canonization process, but their relics were treasured and the annual anniversaries of their martyrdoms were celebrated. Later, the ascetics, who followed Christ through self denial, were numbered among the saints. Bishops and priests who proclaimed the True Faith and fought against heresy were added to the list. Finally, those in other walks of life who manifested holiness were recognized as saints (Frawley, 2021).

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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The process consists of a request being sent to a diocesan bishop for church recognition. Once the letter is received, the Orthodox Church in America's Canonization Commission then forms a research committee with the goal to research the life of the church member. "The Canonization Commission is responsible for reviewing and compiling information concerning the lives and labors of those persons who may be considered for canonization by the Holy Synod of Bishops of The Orthodox Church in America" (Orthodox Church in America, 2021). In some respects, this process appears to be similar to the Roman Catholic first (Postulator) and second (Venerable) stages of canonization.

When the research is complete, they then send a report to the Holy Synod located in Syosset, NY (Long Island, NY) stating their reasons why the member should or should not be recognized as a Saint. It is also important to know that the Holy Synod is the highest authority in the Eastern Orthodox church. Church. Once the Holy Synod concurs with the report, it then assigns a number to the Saint, and orders to have icons painted of the Saint. Shortly thereafter, liturgical services for the Saint are composed under the Formal Rite of Glorification. At this stage, the final memorial service for person is established where vespers and matins with special hymns are chanted. A date of commemoration is assigned and other Eastern Orthodox churches are notified of glorification. This step is similar to the third stage of "Blessed" as described under the Roman Catholic process. Finally, the Saint is placed on the Orthodox Calendar, which is their liturgical calendar that is based on the Julian calendar that was introduced in 1923. So, the Orthodox calendar was established to help bridge the disparity between two separate calendars; the Julian calendar (used by the Eastern Orthodox Church) and the Gregorian calendar used by everyone else around the globe. With the addition of the Saint to the Eastern orthodox calendar, this sounds similar to the fourth and final stage of canonization as described under the Roman Catholic tradition. Since

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Christianity's earliest times, the Eastern Orthodox complete descriptions of miraculous saints and martyrs were read aloud and is a tradition which is still practiced today. The Orthodox refer to these readings as *synaxaria* which in Greek is translated to *Synaxis* – a liturgical church meeting for reading the lives of Saints.

With the Eastern Orthodox Church, there are no assigned classes of relics as previously described in the Roman Catholic Nomenclature process. To members of the faithful belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Church, relics can consist of whole bodies or parts of the Saints. However, there are categories of Saints. For example, the *Whole of Saints or Body* consists of the Prophets, Forefathers such as the ancestors of Christ. Additionally, there are Apostles of Christ, Martyrs and Confessors, Evangelists, Ascetics, Bishops and Priests, and others who are reported to manifest holiness. To the Eastern Orthodox tradition, people can only become “holy” and then sainted through participation in God’s holiness, since no is more holy than God. To Eastern Orthodox belief, all Christians can become Saints if members were baptized, chrismated (similar to *confirmation* practiced in the Roman Catholic church) and received the sacrament of the Eucharist. “Through the work of the Holy Trinity all Christians could be called saints; especially in the early Church as long as they were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, they received the Seal of the Spirit in chrismation and frequently participated in the Eucharist” (Greek Orthodox Dioceses of America, 2021). To the Eastern Orthodox faith, all Christians must work to become Saints. Eastern Orthodoxy points to Leviticus 11: 45 as an example – why humans must be holy. “Since I, the Lord, am the one that brought you up from the land of Egypt that I might be your God, you shall be holy, because I am holy.” Therefore, if we are God’s people, we must consecrate ourselves by accepting the challenge to be holy. To the EO, living a life of holiness is what makes a person a saint.

### ***Icons***

Finally, there are items that are considered to be miraculous – that is, having been endowed with divine power and here I am referring to the icons of Eastern Orthodox Saints. Since Christianity’s beginnings in the first century, icons have been used regularly in prayer in EO services (i.e., Divine Liturgy, vespers) since the first century. The icon, like the gospels of the New Testament, have brought the same good news - but now in pictorial art. Pointing to John, 1:14, where the “word became flesh” the story of the lamb of God is presented in art as holy images. So, images of the lamb, is the grace of the lamb of God, and a symbol of truth – silently shown through images. The mages themselves which are made of canvas, paints from minerals and vegetable pigments, egg yolk (as a binder) water, and finished with gold leafing are not worshipped, but the inanimate object of the content is venerated. The images become the gathering place between those Saints that are with God and the living - faithful parishioners. “In venerating the Icons, then, the Orthodox are championing the basis of Christian faith the Incarnation of God and, consequently, salvation and the very meaning of the Church's existence on earth” (Greek Orthodox Dioceses of America, 2021).

Additionally, in Leonid Ouspensky’s *Theology of the Icon, Vol I*, we can find another interpretation of the icon according to eastern orthodoxy. “The icon completes the Liturgy and explains it, adding its influence on the souls of the faithful. The contents and meaning of the icon and of the Liturgy are the same, and this is why their form, their language, is also the same. It is the same symbolism, the same sobriety, the same depth of content” (Ouspensky, 1992: 9). If I were to internalize this belief myself and share the same view of the icons as that of the Eastern Orthodox parishioners, then I would view the icons as

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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a true tradition that is a part of the orthodox experience – much like a rosary is to Roman Catholics. In other words, the icons follow a sacred tradition. Like Saint Paul, Orthodox Christians do not mimic or copy the way of Christ - his words, his gestures. Rather they integrate the Lord and his way of life into their being, and the same is done with the icons. Leonid Ouspensky, in his *Theology of the Icon, Vol I*, views the icon as a deified prototype – something much more Holy than the human flesh which decays and corrupts. Rather, the flesh becomes transfigured by grace and depicted as beauty – that is- divine beauty.

The icon is venerable and holy precisely because it portrays this deified state of its prototype and bears His name. This is why grace, characteristic of the prototype, is present in the icon. In other words, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit which sustains the holiness both of the represented person and of his icon, and it is in this grace that the relationship between the faithful and the saint is brought about through the intermediary of the icon of the saint. The icon participates in the holiness of its prototype and, through the icon, we in turn participate in this holiness in our prayers (Ouspensky, 1992: 162).

To those of the Eastern Orthodox faith, as holy scripture is distinguishable from other literary work, so is the icon, distinguishable from all other art. Additionally, the Eastern Orthodox church has its own established artistic language that it requires of holy iconographers to strictly abide by using established symbolic lines, forms and colors that conform to tradition. The natural state of the saint being illustrated – that what the Roman Catholic tradition follows – is not what the iconographer wants to present. Rather, the Eastern Orthodox iconographer represents the Saint in a non-natural manner - the Saint in a glorified state or spiritual state. “The icon’s role is not to bring us closer to what we see in nature, but to show us a body which perceives what usually escapes man’s perception, i.e., the perception of the spiritual world” (Ouspensky, 1992: 178). The icon therefore, represents not only the Saint, but the absence of physical world and more of a spiritual world. Through the icon, we view not only more two-dimensional figures, but an image without sound,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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smell, taste and such - senses associated with the physical world and senses that often can be harmful or may lead us astray. The icon at this point portrays not the Saint in the physical world, but the Saint free of corruption and sin – one of inner beauty and spiritual purity. Finally, many of the icons can appear dark in shades or dimly lit because the iconographer is not illuminating the Saint with any light source which may cast off natural shadows. The logic therein goes back to the state of grace the Saint is in which is the Kingdom of God, where all is surrounded with light and no shadows exist. But still, the difference in the styles that can be seen between the East and West is significant when it comes to Holy images and representations of the spiritual.

The marked difference from Eastern Iconography, when one views western Religious art is, that the icons of the Western tradition appear to be more anthropomorphic, whereas the Byzantines in the East sought to project the spiritual, rather than the physical. That is why in the Byzantine Iconography, the portrayals appear so austere in their expression. The disproportions of the physical were always intentional, in order to emphasize the spiritual (Papadeas, 2000: 10).

In some cases, icons have been reported to stream “myrrh” or like-holy substances. Such an icon is referred to as a miraculous image. This very moist substance, which resembles (when touched by the hands) an oil. The substance is dew like in appearance, collects and begins to stream down the icon, without causing any damage to the original art work, or surrounding encasement. In some cases, the icon is a print or lithograph or copy of the original icon and still began streaming the same substance after being touched to the original icon. The “myrrh” it should be known, was also formerly referred to as “oil” or “miro” in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Although the myrrh stream appears only similar in color to actual myrrh (brownish yellow) it is much more of an oily, sweet-smelling liquid (comparatively to that of roses or rose water) that accumulates through what many have

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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described as miraculous, or divine activity. The phenomenon, as to date, have been reported only to occur to images of the Theotokos – the Eastern Orthodox title of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It should be noted that the images of the Theotokos are not necessarily the most well-crafted pieces of art, completed by established artists. Many, as I have stated, are simply affordable reprints, or are painted and hand crafted quickly by monks or other artists. Science itself has made attempts at explaining the phenomena and some of the curious have gone to the extremes to search for hidden reservoirs, pumps, or other conduit-like devices that would provide a steady streaming of myrrh. But none have provided any objective truths that may provide a logical explanation for the phenomena and the effects it has had on believers. “And of course, such naturalistic theories have even more difficulty in explaining the healings, heavenly fragrances, and profound spiritual atmosphere many people experience in the presence of the weeping icons. And what natural theory explains the myrrh bearing incorrupt bodies of many saints throughout the centuries” (O’Callaghan, 1994: 14).

Yet, others refer to the myrrh streaming icons as spiritual sideshows – a distraction to spiritually deceive the faithful from seeking the glorification of God. The faithful however, view the myrrh streaming icons as a streaming of mercy and compassion – to serve as a reminder to the people on earth that the holy spirit is all around us, and through that grace, can be found the healing power through the Theotokos. Other spiritual healing powers can also be found in the Weeping Madonna’s of both the Eastern Orthodox church and Roman Catholic church. Although none of the parishioners or members of clergy from either Faith reflected on the intercession of the Weeping Madonna’s with the exception of one Catholic parishioner, it is still noteworthy of description here to describe their supernatural qualities here, although this discussion will be minimal.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

The three weeping icons, according to Father George Papadeas in his book, *Why Did She Cry, The Story of the Weeping Madonna*, were all originally privately owned copies of art which began weeping in 1960. One image is a lithograph copy of an original icon painted of the western tradition. It is known for a single tear painted on the cheek of the Virgin and is referred to as the ‘Mother of Tears.’ It began shedding tears in 1960 and was witnessed by a member of the press, an Orthodox priest, and hundreds of curious onlookers. The second icon is also a lithograph copy of an original “All Holy Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary” with Christ child. Its original is housed at a monastery in Mount Athos, Greece. It began shedding tears in 1960 as well, on Holy Tuesday. Finally, the third icon (another lithograph copy) referred to as “The Mother of Perpetual Help” began shedding tears the same year. Questions were posed at the time as to why the images were shedding tears, as the same questions are asked to day of the miraculous myrrh streaming icons. There have been speculations of ranging from the decline of morals in the nation to other more mysterious causes. What is interesting to note however, is that tears from the ‘Mother of Tears’ icon copy was tested by a New York chemical company in 1960. According to the editor of the World Telegram and Sun, a metropolitan newspaper of the time, the actual analysis of the tears was not of like human tears. Rather, they were of an oily nature which was unidentifiable but contained traces of chloride only – not of nitrogenous compounds which is typically found in human tears. Nevertheless, these icons are also associated with the ability to miraculously heal people of cancerous tumors and bring hearing to the deaf.

### **Research Question**

What do relics and icons mean to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians today? Are they just “clothed in images or symbols” as the Victor and Edith Turner

suggested in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*? Do they just represent bygone eras where the early Church and its followers were misled to believe in the facsimiles produced by charlatans during medieval pilgrimages? Or are relics and icons instrumental in the development of true faith due to their healing powers? To find answers to these questions I turned to interviewing members from both faiths.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participant Observation (Informal Interviews)**

Parishioners of the Roman Catholic faith were informally interviewed from both St Mary Magdalen Church and St John the Evangelist Church, both located in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. Clergy was unable to be interviewed from the Honesdale parish. However, a member of the laity was interviewed from St John the Evangelist Church. On the Eastern Orthodox side, members of the clergy and laity were both available to talk with and informally interviewed from St Basil the Great Orthodox Church in Carbondale, PA, St Tikhon's Monastery in Waymart, Pennsylvania, PA, St George's Orthodox Church in Taylor, PA and St Michael's Orthodox Church in Jermyn, PA. Unlike the Roman Catholic parish in Honesdale, I had the opposite issue – that is, I had access to interviewing clergy and laity from these churches, but no success in finding interested parishioners willing to be interviewed from the Eastern Orthodox faith.

To begin my data collection, I had reached out to the local Roman Catholic Parish in Honesdale, PA to make contact with the local pastor and explain the intent of the research, its goals and questions I wished to ask of the parishioners. This was accomplished through multiple letters I sent through emails and telephone calls to the business office of the parish in Honesdale and a rapport was immediately developed with the local pastor of St John the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Evangelist church. The same strategy was employed to contact the clergy at the Monastery at St Tikhon of Zadonsk in Weymart, PA which also proved to be fruitful. Other attempts to develop a similar rapport with clergy and parishioners at St Anthony's Chapel in Pittsburgh, PA and the Saint Kateri National Shrine and Historic Site in Fonda, NY proved futile. Therefore, any additional attempts to contact these two institutions was abandoned.

Having met with the local Pastor from St John the Evangelist church, we chatted on the porch of the business office and the pastor expressed genuine interest in my research. He was willing to help put me into contact with multiple parishioners that attended both St John the Evangelist and St Mary Magdalen – two Roman Catholic Churches located less than half a mile from each other. He, already having my personal contact information, promised to get back to me with names and telephone numbers of people he would reach out to and confirm their willingness to be interviewed. It was not long of a wait as the very next day I received telephone calls from the pastor with names and numbers to parishioners that were looking forward to my calls. What was just as helpful was the fact that the parishioners I contacted also reached out to other parishioners explaining my research project to them and a few of them contacted me and arranged a day and time to meet with them. And so, plans were quickly made to begin the interview process with parishioners from the local Roman Catholic churches. I had provided a few options to meet with the parishioners such as the church itself, rectories, public library or a local restaurant of their choice. Parishioners from the Roman Catholic side chose to meet various locations including their church, rectory, and homes. Interviews with members (clergy and laity) from the Eastern Orthodox side chose to meet at their church or rectory. What follows is a complete description of those interviews.

### **Ethnography**

#### ***Interview 1***

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Agnes is an 87-year-old Roman Catholic of Polish descent. She was raised in Carbondale, PA and currently resides in Honesdale, PA with other family members. She has been regularly attending church her entire life as a Roman Catholic. She currently resides with her daughter and son-in-law at their home in Honesdale, PA.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Agnes: I have a relic from Saint Teresa but I have prayed for other Saints to intercede before I got this [Pointing to the relic on the fireplace mantle. See Figures 1 & 2]. I went to church in Allentown and they had the relic of Saint John Paul II. This is his relic [Agnes picks up the relic from the end table near the recliner and hands the object to me]. I went there twice for that relic before I had surgery. I look at that picture and it's almost like he's alive. So, I remember him that way. I went to Rome with our choir years ago. That's how he was when we sang for him. He held that crucifix with his head down and I wondered if he was listening to us or not because he was so like that picture. So it was during the whole song. But he came up after and acknowledged all of us and we had pictures [taken] with him. I pray to him every day. I went to him and this is in a Polish church in Allentown. And I don't know the name of the church but my daughter may know. But I understand they closed that church now.

Agnes: So now I'm trying to find out if they put the relic in the other church they combined with. I think it's Saint Elizabeth. But I went to him twice before I had surgery in my right shoulder. And I went to him before the operation. And I came out of the operation with flying colors. I got up that morning after the surgery and I had no pain, no nothing. I couldn't believe it. I only took one pain pill I think during the whole time. I had so much pain before the surgery. I couldn't bless myself. I couldn't do nothing. It was just so sore. It was the whole shoulder. I used to do stuff with shots but nothing helped. And he [the doctor]

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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said you have to have a complete shoulder operation. And I haven't had a pain since. And I kiss that relic each time I went. When I went the first time, it was a Polish priest. When I was walking in, we met him. And he says to me, he didn't know where I was from or why I was there because I was new. I said, "Father, I'm here for your relic. I'm going to have surgery." So, during the Mass, he said the Mass all in Polish. I didn't understand it but he mentioned my name. He was talking in Polish and telling the people in church that I was there and he was asking them to pray for me. My daughter was there and she said, "Mom, he's talking about you." But I heard my name. It was quite an interesting experience for me. The relic is beautiful.

Interviewer: In that healing that you actually received, do you think that reaffirmed and strengthened your belief?

Agnes: Oh, I believe! – I don't think. I definitely think he helped me. I don't need strength. I have a lot of strength. I just believe in relics and Saints and our Lord Jesus, and Mary. I pray a lot and do a lot of Novenas. I pray and do the rosary. I make rosaries for the church. I try to keep myself busy. Do a lot of word puzzles and reading. My whole morning, I think, is taken up in prayers. I get up in the morning and pray to about 10:30. Then I go in for a nap. I lay down and sleep till about 12:30 or 1 pm. Then I get up I still have some prayers to do. I do my stations every day. Then I still have a few prayers and I do them as time goes on. I do those fifteen prayers to Saint Brigid [St Brigid of Kildare]. I try to do them every day. It's all on the passion of our Lord. I just go over everything he went through. And I love to go over the passion. Can't imagine what our Lord went through. It brings tears to your eyes you know? Our Blessed Mother was there, Mary Magdalen and Mary's sister.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Interviewer: Agnes was really professing her faith to me here. As I was listening to Agnes speak about Saint Brigid of Kildare, I recalled that the Saint is a patron Saint of Ireland – like Saint Patrick. Sources believe she existed between 451-525 AD. In her lifetime, she was a nun that established several monasteries. She is also accredited to having found an art school as well as a school for metalwork. Miracles associated with Brigid abound and it is thought that her blood from a wound she received from being thrown from a horse had cured two young girls of muteness. Saint Teresa of Avila, Spain, as Agnes mentioned, was a mystic and the first nun to be posthumously bestowed with the title of Doctor of Divinity. Considered an uncorruptible during several exhumations of her body, workmen detected the fragrant scent of flowers. The wounded heart, she claimed she inherited from a dream in which an angel pierced her heart with an arrow, was found in 1872 to be actually perforated and in a miraculous state of preservation.

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer while including a relic?

Agnes: I think Saint Teresa here has helped me a lot. I pray to her ever since I've been sick. She's the one I prayed to for so long. That's her relic up there on the mantle. I think Saint Teresa must have sent it to me. I can't imagine how I got it because it was such an unusual way - when I was in South Carolina with my daughter Amanda. And I have aides and they come two times a week. And I had this one aide that comes all the time. She's very nice – Mattie. She's a colored girl. I just love her. She's got a heart of gold. When she can't come, she makes sure someone comes in her place. There was this one day she couldn't come. And this girl came and her name was Terri. It was the first time she came. Very, very nice. I really liked her she was such a nice person. We talked a lot. I guess she noticed different things in the house. She knew that I prayed to Saint Teresa. They would leave at 1 o'clock. They always put the computer on to set up the Mass for me so when they leave, and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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I do that. And I think she had seen when she was there. I had this bag of Saint Teresa – it's like a grocery bag.

Agnes: I took it to Allentown when I was traveling. I had people come up to me and admire her. Oh, I think she saw this bag sitting there in the room. My daughter would put groceries in it. I think that caught her eye – of course with the house too – with the crosses and statues of our Holy Mother and stuff. She didn't say anything and the second day she came back, I was glad to see her because she was so nice. She was Catholic. She said, I have something to show you Agnes. So, she pulled, and pulled this statue out. This relic of Saint Teresa [points to the relic]. And she came over and gave it to me. And when she did, I got so emotional. I was just so happy to get that because I prayed to her so much. She said "don't cry," but I said "I'm just so happy." So, I went to bed that day. I took the relic with me. So, when she went back, she took the relic with her. I thought maybe I'll see her again. So sure enough, I think it was like two or three weeks later. She came again because my aide couldn't come. When they called, I said "Yeah, I want to see her!" The minute she came in I said "I hope you brought the relic with you." She said "Oh yes I did Agnes." And then she took it out and she gave it to me. "Here Agnes – I'm giving you this relic I want you to have it." I didn't know what to do. I was just stunned! I never had a relic given to me. I really cried that day. She had that relic since she was five years old! She's an older woman and she has children and children that are married. And she said her grandmother gave it to her when she was five years old. Everything happened so fast that I never even got her first name. I didn't even get her grandmother's name. But when I go back [to North Carolina], I hope I see her again. But she said back then, "I want you to have it. From what I see here and the devotion you have to Saint Teresa that you are gonna take care of this. If you don't, I'm sure that you're going to give this to somebody who will." But she said, "I don't know. I'm afraid

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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if I die, I don't know what my kids are gonna do. They don't seem to be into this or know anything about it. I don't want something to happen to it that shouldn't happen to it." So, she insisted that I take that relic.

Agnes: So that's how I got the relic. There's a paper document that came with it. I couldn't read it because it's all in Latin [See Figure 3]. But Father Jameson read it to me when I came home. I think he said 1957 was when it was the year on it. It was from Rome. In the relic is a piece of the tip of her [Saint Teresiae's] finger. That's what it says on the paper. He said "Years ago, that's what they did. You can use it to help people, but you can't use it to make money." I asked "what do I do - do I give it to you?" He said "No, keep it. That's yours. It's up to you. You can pass it on to anybody you want. You can keep it. But remember to pray for her, that she was smart enough to give it to you and not let something happen to it."

Agnes: But it has to be over some 60 years old and its beautiful! It's really, really in good shape. I want to frame that paper. Amanda made a copy of it. I kept asking, "Why did I get this relic?" I can't go around with it anymore. I don't drive anymore. I got it for some reason. I try to share it. I want to give it to two other friends that have devotions to Saint Teresa. I know a little boy that's very sick and I'd like to bless him again with it. He's only four years old. He's got a stomach tube, can't talk. His name is Nate. I don't know what his last name is. He's my grandson's wife's sister's little boy. And I met him for the first time during the christening. He was there for the baptism. And they introduced me to him. And I blessed him with the relic and I'd love to do it again. But he was so excited when I showed him the relic. And I sent him with prayers home to the mother, the grandmother and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

grandfather – prayers from Saint Teresa that they should say. So, I hope they're using them – I don't know. I did send some prayers home to them.

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while using relics in prayer or during the time of need?

Agnes: I've been to Rome but haven't been anywhere else. We had to perform in so many churches. We did concerts. So, we were busy. We did get to a lot of churches, different places.

Interviewer: Which Saint do you include most frequently in prayer?

Agnes: Saint Teresa and I do the prayers to Saint Brigid. I pray to our Blessed Mother. I pray to Our Lady of Czestochowa [whom is also referred to as the Black Madonna of Czestochowa – which is a venerated icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now housed at the Jasna Góra Monastery, located in Czestochowa, Poland.] She's the patron Saint of Poland. She's the one that has the scar on her face. Every time they restored it; the scar came back. It never disappeared. There are so many Saints and Martyrs that went through so much. I know Saint Teresa has so much love for our Lord that she prayed for everybody. She prayed for the sinners. She would pray for those that were gonna be hung – that they would go to Jesus before they would be dead.

Interviewer: Have you held other religious identities in past?

Agnes: No.

Interviewer: The interview came to a close as Agnes appeared exhausted. I thanked her for her valuable time and chose to make my exit, thanking her daughter and son-in-law on the way out.

### ***Interview 2***

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Beth is a 69-year-old Roman Catholic that comes from a second-generation Polish-German family. She was raised in Mt Hope, NY, a small village located just 7 miles to the west of Middletown, NY. Beth currently resides in Tyler Hill, NY. She began attending church regularly with her family since baptism. I made arrangements with Beth to meet her at St Mary Magdalen's rectory.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Beth: Elizabeth Ann Seton - a piece of bone. [Elizabeth Ann Seton was the founder of the parochial school system, and became the first American to become canonized by the Catholic church. See Figure 4.] the I was working in ICU [Intensive Care Unit] and a patient came back from OR [Operating Room]. And his wife had a relic on a piece of gauze hanging from his bed. And I treasured it. Unfortunately, he died and she had no Catholic faith. So, she gave it to me. However, about eight years ago, I showed it to a priest. Maybe he was a cynical priest – I don't know. Only because someone in this Parish showed me their relic, and it had no paperwork with it, authenticating that it was real. "Well, I said, I don't have any paperwork." I could see how paperwork could not be passed own, how it would be left behind. But I took it to this priest just to ask. I had him look at it. I don't know if this is true but this is from a priest "There are a lot of relics on the black market" he said. To make a long story short, I no longer have it. I had it in a nice reliquary.

Interviewer: What is the name of Saint or Martyr associated with the relic(s)?

Beth: Saint Anne, the mother of Mary

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance? How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Beth: To Saint Anne - every day. It's part of my morning prayer. However, at this particular time, that was the time I bought her chaplet. The chaplet prayer is an Our Father

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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and five Hail Mary's on each of these [pointing to beads], the first set is to Jesus, the second to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the third to Saint Ann. I believe her Feast Day is the 26<sup>th</sup> of July. And it was around that time before I knew it was her Feast Day, I ordered the statue. I don't need signs - I have a great faith through God. I'm not looking for anything.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Beth: When I was twenty-three, I was raped. I became pregnant. And I gave the baby up for adoption. Ever since she was 18, I've been looking for her. I found her through Saint Anne and the way that happened was just remarkable. To me it's just correlated that there was no doubt in my mind. The fact that I was praying the chaplet was focusing on her. I had been to the agency which handled the adoption. I had been there 13 years previous. And that was because just out of the blue that I'm gonna call them and maybe there is something there. Well yes, she had come there when she was seventeen. New York State has a law that when the child is of age, she can send a notarized paper from the Department of Health, State of New York and if that paper is there, then the birth mother sends a similar paper, again notarized, that she is the mother of so and so. If they end up in Albany, The DOH will give and exchange of information. I never even knew this. They don't send you a letter. So, it was only when I was researching my first computer when I was forty-eight [that this was discovered].

Beth: I was there at my brother in law's as they were having their second child. I sent in the paperwork and was absolutely positive that it was there by now [twenty-five days] and I'll get her contact information by end of September. It never happened. So, another twelve, thirteen years. This would have been about three years ago. Meanwhile, I had signed up with

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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[an account] that you can sign up by mail. Of course, nothing ever came of it. It was a sight, New York State, where you can find people. I wrote in on that. And I checked every few months and nothing, nothing. So, at this juncture, when I had called (she was seventeen) I went to go speak with the social worker who was trained by the one I had talked with years before. She left a file on the table and asked me if I wanted a cup of tea. Now I know what's in that file. She was giving me time - if I wanted to find out more. But did I do that? No. I don't know why I didn't. Perhaps I want to play by the rules. I should have just torn that thing open, but I didn't. So, she asks me when she came back with the tea, "Does she spell her name the same way you do?" I asked her to please just tell me her first name. She said "Anne." So that was tremendous to me. I told her about sending in this information. And she said "When she was here, she asked about you. We gave her the non-identifying information about you - which was weight and height, education, etc."

Beth: There's so much more that could have been said. So that was the end of that. She did help me. I still hadn't worked through all that happened. And that was tremendously tragic but I never worked through it. I think I went back one more time. But I had a family to take care of. Of course, I shared all that with my husband. So, we move fast forward now to three years ago. I'm sixty-six now and she would have been forty-two. So that's when I had asked the social worker thirteen years before, I said "This is really sad - a birth mother cannot leave more information." So, I asked if I could just write something. She said "Of course, all non-identifying." They called it a journal. It was all about me, my children, my husband. It was a novelette basically. I was very, very careful what I wrote. So, I give that to that social worker thirteen years before my second approach. She said "This is a precious document. I'm going to file it. When she comes back, she will have it." They have to make contact - they're not going to call and say your mother was here. So now, we have another

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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social worker who was trained by that social worker. This is three years ago. So out of the blue again, I'm praying and her birthday is twenty August.

Beth: I called around the Fest of Saint Anne. I'm not sure I even knew that at the time. I wrote this down in chronological order because it was amazing to me how all these things are falling into place. It didn't have to be the Feast Day – but it was another piece. I ended up calling and saying, "I'm just asking – I had left a document there in the form of a small book, handwritten, for my birth daughter. I just want to ask if she ever got that book?" The woman wasn't warm. It was almost like I was bothering her. I mentioned the social worker there, Cathy, who put it with the file. When Annie had come at age seventeen, she got the book. The social worker (I found this out through Annie) that they told her that I wasn't looking for her - that I didn't want to meet her, because based on the assumption that there was no paperwork sitting in Albany at that time. So, there's this book that's sitting there and she said, "I'll have to look for it. I've never seen anything like that." So, I was polite because I wanted her to look for it. I got the impression that she didn't want to be bothered with it. I thanked her profusely and hung up. Didn't hear from her. And then Annie's birthday is August twentieth. Two days after her birthday I get a call from this woman. She said, "Your birth daughter has your book." I asked how long she had had it? She said, "since Friday." And I'm thinking, wow! As an agency, they're playing by the book. The main thing was that she knew how much I love her. That's all I cared about. I didn't have to meet her, I just wanted her to know how much I loved her all these years. You need to know that the technicality of the law was that she would have to submit a notarized piece of paper saying I will want to get in touch with my birth mother. That never happened. They asked her. They said, "In order to get this book, you have to do this. She [Annie] said,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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“What are you talking about? That book is from my birth mother, that is my book!” And she got the book without the paperwork. And thank you Saint Anne!

Interviewer: I was looking at the paperwork Beth had on a table and I asked, “Is this all the paperwork associated with your daughter?”

Beth: No, this is a prayer you say at the end of the chaplet. This is a lot to remember so I wrote it down.

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

Beth: Absolutely, more than I could have ever dreamed.

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the Saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

Beth: This is important, and I only realized it in the last week [laughs]. Maybe because we're talking about it or I was anticipating meeting you. On our honeymoon, where did we go? Up to Quebec - old Quebec. Where did we go? Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré [a town in La Côte-de-Beaupré Regional County Municipality, in Quebec, Canada, which is located along the Saint Lawrence River]. And what did we do? There was nobody around. We climbed the Holy Stairs Scala Santa Quebec [the staircase represents the staircase that Jesus ascended to Pilate's praetorium].

So, we're just married and we went there on our honeymoon and that was the next part of the journey. And I thought to myself, we have such a blessed marriage. Incredible children. Very blessed. We went up the stairs. There was no one around. It was not like everyone was lining up. It took courage to do because it's not something you usually do.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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And [we] did the devotion. Then with people standing around...not a lot, around five or six [people], we kind of initiated it, and now looking back, it's like Saint Anne has been so much in our lives that we didn't even know it. How many people go to a pilgrimage on their honeymoon? So, we saw her arm [the arm of Saint Anne]. I didn't like the way that was displayed as a relic. It's in a gold arm, showing the bone. I don't know which bone of the arm. I would have rather seen it in a red velvet case – the arm...I don't know why.

Interviewer: After a discussion on the challenges and current status of today's Roman Catholic Church and thoughts of churches closing, Beth had mentioned how much it saddened her.

Beth: I was seriously thinking about checking out because of everything that has happened in our church [the church in general – as a whole.] I had to separate faith from humanity. It's a human organization. But I had to separate my faith from the humanity – the hierarchy – all of that. That's the only way and it took me a few years. It didn't happen overnight. But I still go to daily Mass. The Eucharist is important to me.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, other location?

Beth: Absolutely. We can pray anywhere. I feel Christ is here within me, within you. And in terms of not even receiving Holy Communion, I believe is truly present. That's not necessarily Catholic doctrine, but that is what I believe.

Interviewer: Which Saint do you include in prayer most frequently?

Beth: Our Blessed Mother.

Interviewer: Have you ever held other religious identity in the past?

Beth: Always was a Roman Catholic.

Interviewer: After a brief discussion on the actor who portrayed Jesus in *The Passion of Christ*, a Mel Gibson film, (Jim Caviezel), and the *Shroud of Turin*, Beth said, “And also,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

I don't know if you have ever heard of the artist of Czechoslovakian descent, who is eight years old, and painted the face of Jesus? Akiane Kramarik. When they superimpose, well, she allegedly as a tiny child - she articulated that she saw Jesus and her paintings reflect all this. But this one portrait of Jesus, she's only eight years old – with an incredible talent of an eight-year-old - when they superimposed the face of Jesus with the shroud from Turin, this particular image, the nose, eyes, mouth and entire structure fits exactly. Very poor family and her mother gave her all the media she used. She was always sketching. She was always looking for a model and one day this person knocks on her door. “That's him!” (Even though he was just a carpenter.)

### ***Interview 3***

Jennifer is a thirty-year-old Caucasian woman that is from Idaho, but now lives in Honesdale, PA. She was raised as a Roman Catholic and has faithfully attended church all her life. I had arranged to meet with Jennifer at St John the Evangelist church in Honesdale, PA. having the basement of the church was private and quiet which provided the necessary environment to help Jennifer feel comfortable.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Jennifer does not possess relics personally but had a moving story to tell....

Jennifer: I have more association or relationship with the Saints than with the relics. I've grown to learn and love each of the Saints through phases of my life. A lot of it comes through the Novenas – just developing that friendship and really trusting on their aid – having more friends to help me in my requests [Here, Jennifer is referring to the Saints as friends. In the Roman Catholic church, a novena is a special set of prayers that is prayed for nine days or longer – perhaps lasting for months for a specific grace or

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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intention. It is a practice that is directed toward a Saint with a specific intention in the hopes of the Saint's intercession.]

Interviewer: I'm curious if there are any Saints you may have sought out for help?

Jennifer: Yes. I have six kids and so I experience anxiety especially with the birth of the last one. Obviously, Saint Gerard has been super helpful. [Saint Gerard was an Italian lay Brother who is often sought out for intercession to help young mothers during pregnancy and unborn children.] I prayed to him for every single pregnancy. And there's been a few experiences where I have learned to grow and love through different phases of my life. Let's talk about my most recent one.

Jennifer: I was praying to Saint Gerard and praying to Saint Anne because she's the mother of Mary and I just love her. She's like our grandmother. Let me back up. My mom has a devotion to Saint Francis. [Saint Francis of Assisi was an Italian deacon and mystic who founded the Order of Friars Minor and was a receiver of the Stigmata.] My mom said, "You really need to start praying to Saint Francis." So, with that pregnancy [Jennifer's fifth pregnancy] I was approaching my due date and I was so nervous. And the night before, my mom knew how anxious I was and prayed to Saint Francis," Just help her" Let this be such a great pregnancy to the end." And that night, at 1 am, I woke up and within forty minutes, the baby was born. I did not experience any pain and it was so fast. I was shocked by this! I made it to the hospital at least. And I get on the phone with her that day and told her I didn't experience anything like I thought I would. My mom said "My goodness, that was Saint Francis – he took care of you." And that was his Feast Day - that day! He isn't the exact designated Saint for childbirth, but I can still ask him for help. So, I pray to him with my next baby.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Jennifer: With my sixth birth, it was really so amazing. I had all my friends praying for me. And I was just calling on the name of Jesus through the whole thing. Again, it was just such a spiritual experience. I couldn't focus on pain, couldn't tell what was going on. All I could do was call on Jesus and he was there. It was so amazing. [Jennifer became emotional and with a release of that emotion and some shedding of tears, she fought hard to get back to her story.] When I had her, I didn't know how it happened. There was no time involved, it was a totally different element going on there. It was such a learning experience for me. There's like so much going on in Heaven, there's so much activity. They're always helping us. And at the same time, it is eternal rest. Be mindful in that – to learn how to rest in our Lord. It helped change the way I see things. It's also just comforting knowing that everyone up there – their goal is to bring us with them. So, it makes it very easy to be friends with them [the Saints].

After a pause, Jennifer continued. “Jesus is always there hearing our prayers – always helping us. There's something really special about the Saints that are willing to help us. It is also important to seek that help from our friends. Not going to worship the Saint – that's not what it's about. They're our friends. They're already there – they're right there. They can do things that we cannot. You feel comforted knowing friends and Saints are praying for you. Especially during moments when you really need help. So, I think it's very important for us to seek that help from our friends and Saints. I grew up going to Christian schools. And it's funny – you know - a lot of them are like, “I'm not worshipping a Saint.” No, no, no – that's not what it's about. It's like they're our friends, like you are my friend. They are already there. They're right there! So, it makes sense to me, why not like have these friends that are so helpful to us? They can do things that we

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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cannot, you know? I guess these are the ones that stick out boldly in my mind. And with having a baby, how could you forget any of that?

Jennifer: Things that have happened in my life - how can people go through life not knowing these things and having this gift?

Interviewer: I think there's many distractions: the mass media, everyday life, people having to work – rushing around doing errands, trying to raise a family. So, it happens – our religious devotions can be pushed aside saying, “I’ll get to it later.”

Jennifer: Yes, there are moments especially where, you know, it's easier to become distracted. But I mean with the whole big picture, especially in those moments where you really feel desperate – you really need help. To not have that gifted to you is like...whew!

Interviewer: How often do you pray to request the intercession of a Saint or Martyr?

Jennifer; It's like when I go to Mass – a Mass for the Martyrs – so that's when Father usually gives a sermon about them that I think about them. I think of that army of white robed martyrs. I'll sit and think about them in awe and wonder. At the same time, I have this prayer going on. I pray to Saint Joseph to help me. [Saint Joseph of Nazareth was married to Mary and was the legal father of Jesus.] It scares to think about being one – a martyr or saint - experiencing what they experience, all the horrors, but at the same time to know they must have been afraid, yet they were given this gift – the gift of courage to persevere to the end like Father was reading today – to the end. I can't imagine that. I don't have a particular devotion to any martyrs. You hear about persecution, and it happens to a certain extent, but we are still free here, especially here in Honesdale. I feel very safe here. I'm free to do this, free to visit Jesus, the Priest is amazing, so here it's very hard to have a true sense of what's

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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going on [elsewhere]. But I believe there is probably a lot going on inside people, myself included that we're not aware of. Like you say, the distractions that carry on each day. My middle name is Perpetua so I do know of her story – it's frightening, also to know how brave she was and courageous. I should probably seek out a better relationship with her just knowing that she was amazing. [Perpetua was a third-century martyr and along with a pregnant slave named Felicity, was martyred. Perpetua, a twenty-two-year-old nursing mother at the time of her death, was put to death, along with others in the Roman province of Carthage located in Africa.]

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the Saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

Jennifer: Eucharistic adoration. [This is where the Blessed Sacrament is adored by the faithful either when the Eucharist is exposed, or when it is reserved in a church tabernacle.] I was on my way to the chapel. It was the anniversary of my grandfather's death. He was a very devout Catholic. He was also the editor in chief of the Latin Mass magazine. So I was on my way, praying for him. I was distracted that day and the chapel, I thought, was the best place to go and really pray. So, when I went in, I take a few moments and just go and block out the world. I began praying then for my grandfather and I look down. That magazine, which I've never seen in there before, was open [Jennifer then began crying lightly]. And his picture was right there! And so, I thought, that's bizarre and so I just kept on praying. And I could see Jesus on the cross. I could see Mary, kneeling, looking up at him. And in that moment, I heard, "grandpa is okay. Everything is okay." It was like this mix of sadness for missing him and joy and trust in Jesus – seeing him on the cross – he died for us. Look how much he loves us.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Jennifer: Things like that just don't happen by chance – there was no way – it was so odd. I left there a little shaken up, thinking, what just happened here? I don't want to claim I saw a vision, but it really was. That is what I saw and that is what I knew from seeing it. I felt very comforted by it – just knowing. Especially when relatives pass away, and just knowing that they are okay. It's kind of a painful mystery to ponder – not knowing. And I still pray for him because I don't want to assume but it was a very comforting moment, just knowing that Jesus is always going to take care of us with Mary right there for us. I also have a devotion to her. I did a consecration to her a few years back [a surrender Novena]. You know especially growing up in a Christian school and all my friends are Christian So I was really hesitant. The Saint of all Saints, as a Catholic it just made sense you hear, “You worship her! – it's another God -you can't do that!” It did make me a little hesitant to become too close to her.

[Jennifer was hesitant to view Mary and devotions to her at first because she did not want to worship her, but to worship God as the true God. But then she did the devotion to Mary for thirty- three days – the total consecration.]

Jennifer: That's where I learned who our Lady really was and all the power, she has for us in our life as Catholics. Ever since then, just knowing how much of a mother she is to us, I've asked her for her help countless times, especially being a mother myself, it's very helpful to know she's a mother herself – to know exactly everything I am experiencing. With everything I've been experiencing so much, she can help me.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, or other location?

Jennifer: Church, home, chapel, anytime I am alone, it is a great opportunity to pray. I notice the more I pray a lot, it's more like a cry out for help. When I'm shopping and I am

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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in the store and I notice people and families. I guess I'm just observant of other people somehow and can just see someone and notice that person is suffering. They might look friendly but you get this sense like, o no God, help them. Just bless them this day our Lord. There are just so many people that need our help. They just need us to pray. I do not get out a whole lot so when I do go to the store, it's like a whole new world.

Interviewer: Which Saint do you most frequently include in prayer?

Jennifer: I pray all through the day – calling on our Lord for help I'm sure many people mentioned Saint Anthony so many times -I ask him for help every day and I rarely know anything about him. I ask him for so much help of him, to help me find things, especially in our home – things are always getting pushed into different places. He's like a daily prayer of mine. [Saint Anthony was a Portuguese friar of the Franciscan order known for his care of the poor and people with illness. He is thought be the patron Saint of things lost. He lived from approximately 1135 to 1231 AD.]

Interviewer: Have you ever held any other religious identity held in past?

Jennifer: I was always Roman Catholic. There was a time when I was younger and I was just confused. I didn't claim to be anything. It wasn't like I was interested in other religions, I just really needed to have that call to get back to our Lord, so this is really good.

Interviewer: [We had a brief back and forth discussion on being away from the church and getting back to it and Jenifer was ready to talk some more. My goal was perhaps to help her recall other thoughts and experiences that she may have put aside.]

Jennifer: I find reading about the Saints that there is just so much we can learn from them. I think it helps your relationship with them just knowing them is just so helpful. Saint Faustina helps me a lot in my trust in our Lord. [Saint Faustina Kowalska was an early

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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twentieth century Catholic nun whose apparitions of Christ was responsible for the Roman Catholic Divine Mercy – a devotion to Christ for forgiveness.] When we try to understand things on our own, I think it helps with your relationship with them. I know there are Saints that are always helping us all through our lives. I just think of being mindful of that daily. It's such an encouraging thing. I think their example is so powerful. Hopefully we're doing the same for others around us. It might not be words we say but hopefully living thorough God – hopefully that's enough for others to be inspired.

Jennifer: I do believe some really beautiful things are happening in the church within the next decade. We know six men within the past year that have been ordained. And they are Priests of Mercy. They are incredible people! [Officially referred to as the Fathers of Mercy, the group is a congregation whose preaching of retreats and parish missions is their primary apostolate. The congregation emphasizes the sacraments – especially that of confession, the Holy Eucharist, faith and the salvation of souls. Their original title during their founding in 1808 was “the Missionaries of France.”]

Jennifer: They are so different from each other. They don't know each other. The way their personalities are, they live in humility. They're very meek. With everything going on today, who would have the courage to answer that call? So, there is something going on here. There are amazing men becoming amazing leaders. The families are growing and what is our goal? To raise our children in the faith to build the church back up. After all the scandals came out, a little bit of our church was lost. People stopped going because they were like they didn't want to be part of it. But who's going to stay? The people who are in our faith for what it is – not for the extra things. I think people were distracted on what our faith truly is. But I think something is really happening here. And I believe as the Priests put

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

it (after the scandals came out) in a sermon a priest gave and he said, “Don’t worry, the Blessed Mother will tell her children to clean their room. If they won’t do it, she’ll just make it immaculate – throw things away– the junk and everything else that needs to be there will stay put. That is what our lady is going to do for the Church.” It was very beautiful and so hopeful. This is just the beginning of the cleanup phase. On top of that analogy to notice things happening, something big will change here. But I think programs like that – things you can watch, are things that are available that are more in tune with what’s modern. So, more people who are really like in touch with that stuff will notice the good – the light - the joyful things. Because people got to be thirsty for it, it’s just hard to find.

Interviewer: Jennifer had noticed she was running late for another appointment so we broke our conversation and she departed. She appeared to depart in a very joyful mood and thanked me for the opportunity to participate in the interview process.

### ***Interview 4***

Edward is a 70-year-old male Caucasian who has traced his ancestry back to north western Europe. He is a first-generation citizen from eastern Long Island that has family ties to England and Ireland. He currently resides in Honesdale, PA. As a Roman Catholic, he has been attending church his entire life and is an active laity member of his church. I met with Edward in the vestibule of St John the Evangelist church in Honesdale, PA immediately following the morning Mass.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Edward: I have a relic at home and it’s from the Veil of Veronica – a second class relic [Figure 4 & 5]. I belong to the Fraternity of the Holy Face of Jesus. There’s a “Veil of Veronica” that’s hanging in the Vatican. Actually, it’s at Saint Peter’s. [The Veil of Veronica

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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is a cloth-relic that bears the image of Christ's face that was produced when Veronica wiped the sweat and blood from Jesus's face when Jesus was carrying his cross. The veil is believed by the faithful to cure blindness, quench the thirst and raise the dead.] What the Nuns did a long time ago is that they took it down and laid it down and laid a linen over it. And then they divided the linen into small pieces. And I have a piece of that linen that's mounted onto an image of the Veil of Veronica. That is a holy face relic.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance? How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Edward: I ask a lot of Saints for help. Saints, and angels. People inside and outside the church think death separates us. It doesn't. We always are. We always were until God brought us into this world. And when He takes us out of this world, we still are always are. Where we reside after this is his decision. So yes, the Saints reside with Christ in Heaven and they do hear our prayers – contrary to what Protestants would think because they eliminated those books of the bible that teach us to pray to the dead. Yes, I pray to the Saints for help. I'll ask anybody I can get help from.

Interviewer: How long have you been married for?

Edward: I've been married for (this is my second wife) and we've been married eighteen years. I have two children. One is a sergeant in the army and the other is a banker. My son just came back from over there [SW Asia]. He was right next to Syria.

Interviewer: So, would you say your prayers are answered?

Edward: I think all my prayers are answered – always, maybe not in the way that I would like them to be answered but God will answer my prayers. He always answers our prayers.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer: Have you personally observed any phenomenon or miracles when praying for the intercession of Saints?

Edward: I never visited a place that had a miracle. I've been to places where I'd get a very odd feeling. For instance, I took my wife out west - I used to spend some time out there in the summer. I took her to the battlegrounds of Custer's Last Stand. And every time I go there, I get this really odd feeling – almost like it just happened even like I walk through the cemeteries here, I pray for a lot of people. And I get that feeling there too. That's why I really don't believe we're really separated from the dead and we can ask them to pray for us too. But I never visited a place like Medjugorje. I've never been to Jerusalem in the Middle East where I know Jesus was there.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly?

Edward: I pray all the time. There are people that need prayer for anything. I don't know who they are. God knows them. I don't have to know them. But if I see they're suffering, or ailing, I'll just say a quick prayer in my mind for them. To me, that's constant prayer. If it gets congested up while driving, I say please God please, loosen up the traffic so I can get to where I'm going. It's all prayer. What it is, is all connection. That's what I think relics are. People have relics and don't even know they have relics. Maybe not religious relics or spiritual relics – like our father will give us a pocket knife – that's a relic. My mother gave me a plate of food one time a while back and she left the fork on the plate. When my mom passed away, I use that fork every day. It's kind of a relic. And people have connections to those things that are related to a friend, a family member or something like that and they're in search of that connection to them and to remember them by. So yes, relics are everywhere. It's in that connection that's there's a deeper connection that most people

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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don't really understand. You see, that would connect you spiritually and mindfully in our remembrance but there are other connections like in Holy Mass.

Edward: In Holy Mass, we can become connected spiritually and through our hearts. But we're also connected in the physical Holy Mass. We are united to each other through the body and blood of Christ. We take that in, we actually become one. A lot of people just don't realize that. It's a hard thing to grasp. You see, Jesus isn't Catholic – he's a Jew, Judean. In fact, the one of the more overlooked quotations of Jesus is the fact that He says that salvation is of the Jews. That kind of leaves a lot of people out. So, what does he do? He throws himself on the cross - and gives us his body and blood. And there's not a Jew today that can trace their body and blood line back to the House of David. You think about that – no one can because the Jews were wiped out like five hundred years after AD. Pretty much there was a woman with a few children left after Masada. And none of them can trace their body and blood back, but we can. We took it into our body and became one with each other. And we can now trace the body and blood all the way back to the House of David. And so, he's provided that avenue for us to have that Jewish body and blood to achieve salvation.

Edward: You see that picture there – that's from the Divine Mercy. If you were to look at the blood there, - if you were to imagine that would represent the twelve tribes of Israel – that blood – because Israel was actually a race made of twelve tribes. But look at what's united the heart – the water of baptism. See how we're united? All in Christ. And he provides his blood for us. So that we can achieve salvation. Not too hard to understand really. There's a tremendously big picture there. And it shows there's an opportunity and a love for everyone. The souls that we have are not our own. They are going to die. Even the body that we walk around in belong to God. We have one thing – free choice – and that's

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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what we have to rely on to make a choice. But that's the connection – that's how we're united. That's why people collect relics and religious love – because they want that connection back to their family, back to the devotions.

Edward: Ever since I was a boy I was attracted to the face of Jesus – not so much the veil of Veronica or the Holy Shroud of Turin. But with any artist's rendition, I was always attracted to it. And so that's why I have that devotion that I had for many years. And that's why I have that relic that I have. It came to me through a very odd way. So, I knew it was from God. I was renovating a barn up north of here. While I was pulling the building apart, I found some things up in the loft of the barn. And I found that relic up there. So, I asked the owner if I could have it and he said, "yeah." God presented that to me and here this is a fairly rare relic and I have it now. That's how it came to me.

Interviewer: Would you say your faith is confirmed daily?

Edward: That is something we have to do. We need to reaffirm faith every day – because mankind is weak. People are like sponges – ideologies and discipline can be manipulated. You know – softened and twisted. Don't want that little toad to get into the door – become a foot, then a knee and then the door is pushed open and then your discipline and ideology becomes something different. We have to be on our guard all the time and a renewal of faith every day.

Edward: We have human senses: eyes, ears, and we take things in through those things and they can really have us run amok if we're not paying attention to the right things and to the wrong things. The world is just full of lies today. It's hard to find the truth anywhere [Edward admitted he does not listen to the news]. It's just blatant lies - a lot of it. People in general, no matter where you go, you've been in the Army, etc., etc., and what I've

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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found among people is that we're all the same. Most people have - all they want to do is live in peace. They want to raise their families. They want to be productive, they want to have a job and provide, keep their families healthy and all - basically what everybody in the world wants. But then you have these governments and that's where things go wrong. So, when you listen to the news, it's so manipulated, and you live surrounded with lies, you want the truth, it's right here – in the Catholic Church. I don't condemn other faiths. Don't get me wrong. Because most states, people, especially Protestantism, people of Presbyterian, Anglican, because their parents were, and their grandparents were, this is how we do it – it's a generational thing. And I'm not condemning that. It's because humankind is kind of like that. It's because of that connection, we have our grandparents, parents, etc. It's kind of like the reason why the Irish stuck together in New York, and the Italians stick together in their neighborhoods. It's because of that territorial connection they have. But everybody has a connection to something and everybody really needs to understand that they need to be connected to Christ.

Edward paused a moment and continued: So, I ask him, what do you want me to do? If I don't want to do something, he'll grab me by the ear and I'll do it. That's just the way that it is. So, a quick prayer about what I'm going to do and off I go. That's the presence of Christ in us. We should never be afraid of Jesus. There are times where it's very formal. You can sit down – and I like to go hiking. I'll just sit in the woods and read scripture and just talk to God. Very informal. Then there's the times when you have to treat him like a King, because that's what he is and you do that at Mass – the more formal setting – where we're going to bring him into our presence now and celebrate his words. Some of his words are taken very lightly. I always thought they should stress more the “do this” and “take this.” So those are the connections. A lot of people are kind of like the bees – they have their job to do

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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and go about it in the hive and just do it. Humans are a lot like that. We just go about our ways and don't understand everything. But if you look for a deeper understanding and you search for it and you ask God to show you, He will show you. I always prayed – show me Lord – show me your miracles, show me your mercies, show me your will. And He does. Your eyes will be opened and you will be surprised by what you see. People don't realize they just come to Mass. They become the mundane. It becomes the ritual. It becomes the routine. What's happening is – there is a miracle every day, every Mass, the Priest provides a miracle. There's a lot of miracles and there's a lot of answers to prayer. Every prayer is answered. It's just some the answers we don't want to see. And some we see and we're happy for them.

Interviewer: After a short conversation about current television programming and how dark it is, I mentioned how dark the programs can be and that we rarely see anything about miracles.

Edward: We tend to glamorize darkness. And they try to make it look good in a way. Like this bad guy is kind of good. In a way it's kind of true because Christ is in all people. That's one of the things I look for too – is Christ in people. He's there! He's more in others than in some. And the opportunity for helping darker people is there [dark in spirit]. And so, we need to pray for them. And people just have to start with the truth. Live in the truth, not in the lies. Because the darkness is the lies. That's why we call Jesus the Truth. He is the truth. With relics, it's all a connection to something we really don't understand. Not just to a parent or to a friend or a Saint or anything else like that. It's actually connections to Christ. That is the ultimate connection. All relics, all of those feelings have to be understood that the connection all leads to Christ.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer: Was there any cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, and you made a request for guidance, other?

Edward: I bought a new truck seven years back. I was living down in Long Island at the time. And I'm driving along Sunrise Highway and it's like a seventy-mph highway. And all of a sudden, this new truck, decides to stop. I didn't know what was wrong with it. I couldn't move and it was in the worst place. It was a bend and with concrete embankments on all sides. There's no shoulder. And people are zipping by me blowing their horns because I'm stopped. You can't see me because you're coming around this curve and there I am. I'm just going "mercy, God, mercy, God. And I opened the [passenger] window – I was going to go out the passenger window because the cars were just missing my truck. All of a sudden, I hear a beep and there's a tow truck next to me with his lights on in the next lane so people can see him. He goes, "you need help?" So, I said "yeah!" He got out and put cones out and he towed me off the road. That's immediate answer to prayer. I'll never forget that. I just felt the presence of God right there. There's been other times too. Simple – nothing exaggerated. But these things happen to everybody in their lives and they don't understand it. The response that I got is because I'm a Catholic, is because I say Hail Mary's it's because I do things over and over again. The first response I had was to pray to God right away for Mercy! That's the discipline. It's like the soldier who's doing 500 pushups. It's like the marathon guy running 25 miles. It's over and over again because it strengthens us. It forms us – it becomes part of our being.

Edward: We're not only a physical person, we are also a spiritual person. Creation to me is not complete until there is baptism, confirmation, and the receiving of the sacraments Jesus laid out because that's part of creation too. And People don't understand that. We have

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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the bodies – let's do the rest of the work. But God did his part by creating us. Now let's make the right choice by finishing creation. Receiving the sacraments is part of creation too. Not only are we taking on our own physical body and blood but we're taking on the physical body and blood of Christ. And we're becoming unified. That's one of the small miracles that happened for me and how he rescued me right away. I thought I was going to die. We have resources.

Interviewer: Have you ever held any other religious identity in the past?

Edward: My family is split. My mother, brother and I are Catholics – we were baptized Catholic. My two sisters and my father are Protestants. So, it makes for an interesting household. But I was raised in a Lutheran church. I know a lot about other religions and disciplines which is the reason why God wanted to show me these things. It's in those things that I've grown to know and understand with a bigger love and appreciation and appreciation for what's here in the Catholic church. A lot of people think (especially Protestants) they look down upon Catholicism. But really, we're the original church. They don't go back that far until the 1500's with Martin Luther. He had some concerns but he ended up marrying a nun, which he wasn't allowed to do. So, was it actual theological concerns or was it mutual concerns? And he had children with this nun. So, was he Protestant because he wanted to get married? That's a question I ask myself.

Edward: I've been to other churches but they are devoid of the body and blood of Christ. I've always believed what Jesus said. So, they are devoid of that. They do not have the chain or line of hands being right upon them through their clergy that we have – that Saint Peter passed on to everyone else. Unless you actually believe that is truly the body and blood, you're not Catholic. And you're not listening to what Jesus is telling you. Listen and open your ears to what he says. I like to practice both Masses. I like to practice the normal

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

order mass and the Tridentine. The former is the last supper. We live in a time machine at Mass. It's like you're going to a dinner. At the time of the consecration, everybody's quiet looking up and adoring Jesus. At the original Lord's supper, the disciples didn't know what was going on. They weren't aware. Jesus is doing something different here. What's going on? They weren't aware that he was going to be put to death the next day. The Tridentine mass is totally different. You go in, you're silent. It's like now you're at the foot of the cross. Now you understand. The priest is doing, what Jesus told him to do. There's life in speaking truth. That is the connection he gives – through truth. Truth is the connection he gives us.

Our conversation had ended and we heard a beep outside of the church from a car horn. Edward, looking out the window, said, “that's my ride. I should get going. It was a pleasure speaking with you. See you at Mass some time!”

### ***Interview 5***

On June 25, 2021, I had the pleasure to interview a family of Roman Catholics, all over the age of 21 of course. The mother, Louise, is 79. Her husband, Alvin, is 65, while Louise's daughter, Judy, is 31. All are of Euro-American descent as raised in Philadelphia, PA but now reside in Honesdale, PA. All of them have been attending the Catholic Mass since birth. Meeting them on a Thursday in the basement of the church was the perfect location as they had just attended the 7:30 am Mass. Sitting down at a folding table and folding chairs, I began the interview.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use in prayer.)

All: Yes

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer: Name of Saint or Martyr associated with relic(s)?

Louise: These are a few of what we have. We have five other relics besides these four. And we have papers [authentication documentation] with these too.

Alvin: This is Saint Charbel – a second-class Relic, and his body oozes oil every year on his Feast Day and this was touched to that oil. This is a relic of Saint Faustina – a first-class Relic, of Divine Mercy fame [Figure 6 & 7]. It's mounted on a cross reliquary because of the Revelation of the Divine Mercy. The whole Revelation ties into the mystery of our redemption of the Pascal Mystery. If you are familiar with the Divine Mercy, the blood and water which gush forth from the heart of Jesus is a fountain of Mercy for us – I trust in you – so that's why we have it mounted on a cross because the whole revelation ties into the mystery of our redemption – the Paschal mystery and that's our posture of spreading devotion to the Divine Mystery. This is a relic of Saint Teresa DeGesú – a first-class Relic [Figure 8]; and a relic of Saint Elizabeth Seton – a first-class Relic. Five other relics were left home [Figure 9]. Alvin: And this is the image of our Lady of Guadalupe on cactus fiber paper that the actual image would be on [Figure 10]. This lasts no more than four years – you can actually see it fading now – I had it for twenty-two years. And you can see, it's starting to disintegrate. So that's the image [a reproduction of] of our Lady of Guadalupe. It will be five hundred years in 2031. Aztec Indians were converted by way of this image. Interestingly, insect infestation that find the cactus fibers as a food resource should have destroyed the tilma image located in Guadalupe. The Freemasons that were down in Mexico, in the original Guadalupe image - there is a tarnish because they actually threw a bomb at the image to destroy it, but it didn't [become destroyed]. That can be seen actually in Guadalupe.

Interviewer Note: It should be noted that it was thought by some people that Freemasonry was an organization that was responsible for the attack against the image.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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However, other accounts report that the item was attacked by an estranged young man with other designs. On the morning of November 14, 1921, where just outside of Mexico City, Luciano Perez Carpio, an employee of the Private Secretariat of the Mexican Presidency, entered the sacred church bearing a bouquet of flowers. After placing the flower bouquet down near the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, he crossed himself and departed. The bouquet then exploded destroying much of the building's interior but the tilma miraculously survived without any damage.

Alvin: So that can actually be seen in Guadalupe. The Aztec priest knew that everything stood for - the whole attire saying that she would be an Aztec princess. Miraculous image of our Lady of Guadalupe. Aztec Indians converted by way of the image. The way the sash is displayed, represents that Mary is going to give birth very soon. It's December twelfth represented here. Even science has a part of this because you see on her mantilla, there are 47 stars that are present. And there are 47 stars that can be seen in the constellation over Guadalupe in Mexico, that night. They all knew she was a woman of Revelation 12. Woman clothed with the Sun. The moon under her feet, a crown of twelve stars on her head. This is a gift of the Revelation that John had seen and this brought nine million more back to the faith. Today, over a million people visit the shrine in Guadalupe annually. In the eyes (this was brought up by a Japanese photographer in the '90's.) When he took the picture, he actually saw all those who were present with Juan Diego. They were all in one pupil and that they reflected back, who was there at this actual time. [Nicolás Enríquez painted this original of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1773] With the Aztecs, why the priest converted them is because their priest knew what everything stood for, the whole attire saying that she would be an Aztec princess. The cross right up here was the Franciscans

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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cross. That was the cross bore by Cortez when he conquered them all. The sash would have said to them that she is with child.

Interviewer Note: The resulting discussion that ensued regarding some of the interesting phenomena associated with the tilma is convincing. For example, under magnification, the eyes are astonishingly life-like and some have claimed to see the likeness of a bearded man in the pupils as well as a dozen other figures, who many claim are those witnessing the revealing of the Tilma to church officials.

The bearded man corresponds to contemporaneous pictures of Juan Diego. No human painter could have foreseen putting infinitesimally small images of Juan Diego in the eyes of the Virgin so that later advances in human technology could detect them. Furthermore, it is impossible for any human to have painted the images because they are simply too miniscule to produce. Jose Aste Tonsmann, a Peruvian ophthalmologist, examined Mary's eyes at 2,500 times magnification. He was able to identify thirteen individuals in both eyes at different proportions, just as a human eye would reflect an image. It appeared to be the very moment Juan Diego unfurled the tilma before Bishop Zumárraga. (Marshall, 2016).

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Louise: Yes

Interviewer: How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Louise: Daily, and Feast days. There are certain Saints I call on every single day to pray for special intentions. And for theses [pointing to the relics they brought in] I address them every morning. And I ask them to pray for all my family here on earth, anyone in purgatory, and that I will have the virtue that they most excel at.

Alvin: These Carmelites Saints - through the Grace of God there might be a Carmelite monastery built on the property. Interesting because Carmelite Saints means Mary's Garden, so I speak with the reverend mother that there is not a better place to have a

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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garden than on her land. It all came through private revelation but confirmed through spiritual direction.

Interviewer: Have you visited places where miracles occurred?

Louise: The big thing with us is that we went to Canada for Saint Anne, Andre Bessette. She's been very big in my life and that's what started with me. First of all, we have veneration to the Saints because it's God's will. It's his idea. It's nothing that came from mankind. And thinking about it, we come to realize that, why he has done it is because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, like Jesus said in the Gospel, he is the God of the living, God of the dead, so he wanted us to be close and think of them as our brothers and sisters who would intercede for us. So, what he does is - I came to realize this as time went on - he gives us rewards. He doesn't have it in our heads to just pray to them. But we get answers. We get results and He does that to have us grow in our closeness with them – that we're going to be with them some day. So that's how I came across Saint Anne and God wanted me.

Louise: That's another thing I came to realize – because I'm older – being seventy-nine. I had more to think - to think things over and came to realize that we do not choose – the Saints that we are going to be close to. They are chosen for us from God. So, my first one was Saint Anne. When I was a teenager, I had a lot of operations, I was hit by a truck when I was young. So, with my monthly cycle, I went into unbelievable pain. When everything is over, you see God working in it. Like I said to my mother, “Except for my face, the greatest thing that has ever happened to me was that God allowed me to get hit by that truck and be in the hospital.” It made me serious about my life. And search – who's happy – who's happy in this life? And I went through a pilgrimage of reading people's lives. I've studied people's

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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lives. The rich: no, they weren't happy. Movie stars – no. Painters' gifted people, talented people: no none of them were happy. The only people that were happy were the Saints.

Louise: So, I went through a lot of pain each month and it got to the point that I thought I was going to pass out from it. So, I was given the thought. Saint Anne: Ask her to help you. So, I said, "If you will take this away, I would go to the library, (I was only thirteen) I'm going to go to the library and read about you." She took it away and it never came back. So, I went to the library and I did what I was told. So that started me with as far as reaching out.

Louise: Of course, the Queen of all Saints - we don't have any relics of her – our blessed Mother. She's been throughout our whole life. She's the largest in our life – the blessed Mother. Through devotion, she performs miracles and she has shown me. Someone had asked, "Will this really lead you closer to Jesus?" I was all caught up with the Blessed Mother. And people say, "Will this bring you closer to Jesus?" And I said to them, "I'm always going to remember her name – Phillis, I said I'm always going to remember you asking me that."

Louise: As time goes by, I'm going to reflect on my life. And yes, she not only brings you closer to Jesus, she also shares things about him that you would never realize, through what you read, what you've come across, she shares her son with you more and more. And then Saint Anne, two other times, she came to my rescue. And like you're saying about relics, I had the Holy water from Saint Anne in Quebec. And with my last baby who died, they had trouble with me, my blood wouldn't reproduce, I had water in my lungs, they couldn't stop me from coughing, and they were really worried and I drank it and I asked her to help me. And she stopped it. They brought up machines after that and after all the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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coughing I did for hours, they thought it [the Holy water] would damage my lungs. They took a picture and my lungs were fine. So that was two big times with Saint Anne. And she's my patron Saint. So, between her and the blessed Mother they're the two significant ones.

Alvin: The blessed Mother has really been paramount in my life. I think Louise had introduced me to true devotion to our Lady from Louis de Montfort. I would go to the blessed sacrament a lot and one time it was around three o'clock in the morning - and true devotion - something like you do at different times, before you can grasp a hold of what our Lord is. Our Lord is trying to come to us through our Lady so that's why he wants us to return to him. And I guess this was probably in the nineties' times just seems to pass by but, before the blessed sacrament at three o'clock in the morning, I got in the car to drive home, I didn't remember the fifteen-minute drive from my house to the blessed sacrament. And with that whole time, I do not remember driving the car home. There was only one thing was said to me that reverberated in my mind: "The only safe refuge you will have at this time is being truly devoted to my Mother." And that's the key to our Holy Catholic faith because she is the terror of demons. She will dispel all heresies. That's what's going to happen. But if we can avail ourselves to our blessed Mother, then we'll come to an understanding of greater love that we will have for Jesus because they're two hearts that beat as one. And that's what you have to come to know.

Alvin continued with his beliefs: Think about the veneration of the Saints. I cannot say that one Saint has been so outstanding other than maybe Saint Faustina as you know I have a devotion to her, maybe not as great as I should. It's more like to the divine mercy. But I do pray to Saint Faustina occasionally. For anybody that has an interest in this, not only just

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

the relics of the Saints who aren't corrupt. I was privileged one time to be in Rome and a priest once took me around to show me seven incorrupt bodies inside of Rome. Right there in the churches of Rome. One stood out. He was an Augustine canon. I'm looking at the body of Josepie Tommaso. Father, I said, "Am I imagining things? He looks like he has stubbles on his beard like it's growing." He goes, "Oh yes, they shave him twice a year." You think of Bernadette at Lourdes [France]. The first black priest in Philadelphia, Monsignor Norell had a first-class relic of Bernadette. What happens in Lourdes is that every year, they take off thirty-three pieces of her flesh and they put them in a reliquary. He is the only one I know that had a piece of Bernadette's skin. And it grows back. The skin grows back!

Louise: There's so many all over the world.

Alvin: When Jesus said "I am the light of the world", he is saying, God is speaking to you. I am the light of the world. The light now becomes a distinct reality. It's actually a living entity. And even Albert Einstein proved that if you can get through the spectrum of light – the speed of light, then time ceases. So, with our Lord, the eighth day is the octave we celebrate in the church. It's the eternal day – the day that never ends. It's the day of light. The light comes from the lamb. So just in thinking of that, God lives out of time. Everything is always present to God. So, when you come into that light, so many people who have had near death experiences said they have come into the light, that all time ceases. And you live where God lives in the present. And the Holy Church gives us that. In six days, he created the world, the seventh day he rested, the eight day which is really celebrated in the Easter Rite, is the octave...the day that never ends. So, it's all one day. The greatest octave is Easter to divine mercy Sunday. So, God's realm, he wants us to live out of time and live where He lives in the Octave. It's only one day.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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(Interviewer note: Judy then chimed in with her preferred Saints to seek intercession with.)

Judy: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's relic which is interesting because she is one the first American female Saints. I don't think we have a lot of relics from Saints that are actually from this country. I think I received that when I was seven or eight for my First Communion. We know these people that make actual statues of Saints. What is unique about them is that they would put actual pieces of clothing on them. They would put actual material on the statues So it would be a painted statue, but there would be clothing on it too - like a habit or a rosary.

Louise: And their relics were in the hundreds and they would pray to the statues. We don't really have any relics of her [Mary], the Blessed Mother, and she's been throughout our whole life. She's the biggie of our life – the Blessed Mother through devotion.

Alvin: it's very difficult to get a first-class relic now. One has to actually go through a Bishop, a Monsignor, somebody in a higher position because of the selling of relics on eBay.

Louise: That's why we have letters. I received these relics some thirty years ago. It was a seminarian who was going to Rome and through the Priest I went to; he took our names and asked us if there was any one, we wanted. He would go to the convent room. They were in charge of them – of all the relics. And he got them. The second time he went, it stopped. No more.

Interviewer Note: Like Adolf Hitler, he had a huge interest in anything with religious power and stopped at nothing to obtain them.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Alvin: Longinus Spear – He [Hitler] believed he was going to control the world if he had that.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Louise: The other time with Saint Anne was this [laughs]. Just a little thing I did what I was told. As far as reaching out, the Queen of all Saints. My nervous system is very sensitive from my operations and everything. And with my first husband, God taught me how not to ever give in to self-pity. And how he did it was, I was having my feelings hurt, things were said and I started crying. Well, I thought, get it out of your system so stop. I couldn't stop. I lost control. The thought process that made me cry – it kept going into it and going into it. I couldn't stop it. And I sat down and looked to our blessed Mother and asked her to stop it. No, I wasn't going to get an answer that way. So, then my husband came up and he saw me where I could not stop crying. I thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown. I had three little ones so I remembered the Holy Water from Saint Anne's Shrine. And I said to him, get that Holy Water. So, he brought that in and I start talking to her [holy Mother] and try to concentrate with her appearing before God and stop me from crying. Meanwhile, he's on the phone talking with my mom telling her she can't stop crying. "She's now talking to Saint Anne," and it stopped. The process stopped. It taught me a lesson. You are never to cry because you are feeling sorry for yourself. Self-pity is not to be part of your life. And it scared me so bad that I would never do it again. I could cry because I could feel bad for somebody. I can cry normal. But I remember, you are never to cry in self-pity. It was a hard lesson.

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Louise: Yes.

Judy: I think the Saint we pray to the most when we need something is Saint Therese because she seems to be the one that provides the most readily signs that she has heard your response. I'm sure you heard about praying and asking for a rose. A lot of people do that. I myself had an experience where I was in high school and trying to decide about going to a certain college. So, I did a novena to Saint Therese. I don't know how much I thought hard on it, if she was going to respond or not. But I really needed an answer. So, I had prayed a nine-day Novena and I think half way through I changed my mind with the color rose I wanted. In the beginning I wanted a pink rose. I thought, that's too easy, I can see those anywhere, I should ask for a yellow rose. I think on the ninth day, I kind of forgot about it. I forgot I was even looking for a rose. So, I sat down to breakfast and there were roses on the table. I almost fell out of my chair. There were yellow roses with pink tips. She worked her way around that – out of my confusion - Saint Therese. I wanted yellow roses and pink roses so I got yellow with pink tips. This happened in Wisconsin. I went to Franciscan University. That' was the school I supposed to decide to go to or not. It's one thing that comes to mind. I heard the most about Saint Therese being the one to readily respond to prayers and give a sign. I heard multiple stories of that. I majored in Spanish and I minored in psychology and business management.

Alvin: I can give a couple. For the Carmelite Monastery that is going to be built, we were praying to Saint Therese. One day from the Parish, a woman, Patti, was doing the Novena with us. She asked "Are you certain if this is really God's will?" So, she did the Novena and I think on the third day of her Novena she got she got a rose. There is a statue of Saint Therese right up here as you exit the church. So, I didn't receive any rose but she had given me a rose petal. So, it was the ninth day of the Novena and it happened to be the Feast

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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of the Sacred Heart. So, I walk up to the statue and ask St Therese, and say, “You gave Patti a rose, what about mine?” being belligerent. So that day, in the mail, a woman had sent a card to me and on that card was a yellow rose with a pink tip. So, I think back about that. But it was mailed out on the fifteenth of May from Florida and I didn’t get it till that day when I opened the mail up and there it was, was a card with a beautiful rose on it. During the Feast of the Sacred Heart and answering her with what I just challenged her with two hours before. So, I said everything is going to be fine. The other time was the oil we got at St Joseph’s Oratory up in Canada at Saint Andre Bessette’s Shrine. He had a great devotion to Saint Joseph. Andre Bessette only slept one hour a night. So, he was pretty incredible with his devotion to Saint Joseph.

Alvin: Joe and Scott who provided a lot relics for us were at our house back when we had our dog, Charity. This goes back maybe 15 years ago. And I had tremendous pains in my stomach at night. I couldn’t even sleep. I went out of bed and went downstairs. Well, when I was downstairs, I was on the couch and I was holding my side. And the first thing that happened was our dog Charity came over and just laid her head right there on my stomach. To give a quick story about Charity, when the children were young, they wanted a dog so we got this dog and they all went through a name in a hat. So, I’m going to Mass that morning and the Lord said to me at Mass, name the dog Charity. So, we’re coming home and I threw my name in the hat. Judy picked the name out. She picked out Charity. So, I saw that as an act of charity and the thought came to me – get the Saint Joseph oil. I get the oil and put the sign of the cross where the pain was and the pain went right away. I don’t think it was indigestion, but I think it was bad. It was taken care of.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Louise: What I want to bring out in a strong way is the idea of the Blessed Mother – in other words, her intercession. When I was young, and went to church all the time, just to be with our Lord, (St Alphonso Church) they would always tell stories about him and his love for the Blessed Mother. Back then I didn't have any big thing for the Blessed Mother. My thing was Jesus. To be with him, I did the Novenas. Through the Novenas, my mother, my grandmother, I came back to the faith. When I was in the Legion of Mary, and our big thing is true devotion to the Blessed Mother, I would think, what's the outcome of true devotion that I have seen in my life? And it was each person in my family, when they die, I am shown in different ways, that they saved their soul. And they weren't people that practiced their faith. One was a homosexual uncle, and I was shown. He saved his soul. My one uncle, he didn't go to confession so he felt bad because when he was young, a priest left a woman's house that was dying and made fun of her. And he said to me, Louise, they're only men and I'm not gonna confess my sins to that. He never did have that opportunity but I was shown that the moment he died, I was on my knees praying to Saint Joseph. I said, "He reminds me of you Saint Joseph," my uncle was so sweet and smiling. Well, you see he had a Holy death [St Joseph], and then five minutes later, my aunt was calling to say he just died. So, I was on my knees interceding. So, in other words, our Blessed Mother shown me every single one saved their soul.

Alvin: For hunger thirst or righteousness, I will give you your fill. Well, he is the truth, and that is the truth. That's why the sacramental life of the church – you have the world, the flesh and the devil which are our viable enemies. But what does our Lord say in the Scriptures? My grace is sufficient. That's all he has to say. That means for us our free will act of love because that's where love is in the will. Then I avail myself to the sacraments - try to go to confession as often as possible. Mass and communion every day if possible. He

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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gives us all we need to go through this valley of tears to come to him. The great sin of all time is the denial of Jesus Christ is the Lord. Because all the adverse effects of other sin it comes down to denying Jesus Christ. We claim we are one nation under God. We mock God. He will not be mocked – because we are not one nation under God. Because if we were truly free – Jesus said you’re free without sin. There’s where your authentic freedom lies. And that’s what we have to come back to – to truly become one nation under God.

Alvin: Would like a piece of good news, Darrell? Our Lady said at Fatima, “My immaculate heart will triumph.” We’re coming to that era. Russia will be converted. You see that Satan through the media is the voice box of the devil. We demonize Russia constantly. Russia is coming to God unbeknownst to most people. Right now, there are more Roman Catholic churches than before the Bolshevik revolution. They are on the move to God. So that’s part of the Virgin’s promise of Fatima. Russia has always had a great devotion to the Theotokos – the Mother of God. And it was a diamond in the rough that our Lord wants back. And now Russia is going to spread God throughout the world, unbeknownst to most people. They demonize Vladimir Putin all the time. Right down here at St Tikhon’s, there’s a priest down there that knows the priest that spiritually directs Vladimir Putin - whom goes to confession once a month. Not many world leaders go to confession once a month - and tries to go to divine liturgy [eastern Orthodox Mass] every week. So, what you hear from the media about Vladimir Putin is a lie. It all started around 2011 when he came. The monks of Mt Athos had the belt of the Blessed Mother [the girdle]. He came out in the dead of winter [in Russia], fifty degrees below zero with people on a trek ten miles long to venerate the belt of our Lady. He knelt down and kissed her belt and it was back in 2011. I believe that’s when the conversion of Vladimir Putin began. Even the secular people will tell you this. Charlie Rose was interviewing Henry Kissinger. Charlie Rose is trying to dig up dirt on

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Vladimir Putin. And Kissinger says to Charlie Rose, “You don’t know who Vladimir Putin is now. Vladimir Putin is a changed man. He’s coming towards God.” And this is coming from Henry Kissinger who is an atheist - and this is on a PBS talk show! We have a priest friend, Father Myron over in Vladivostok, Russia. He has by the Grace of God opened twenty Roman Catholic churches in Vladivostok. And they have two pro-life homes.

Alvin: The government of Russia gives them money for their pro-life homes. The United States govt doesn’t give money to pro-life homes – in fact, they give money to planned parenthood. I wonder what Ronald Reagan would say today? Who’s the evil empire now? So, all they have to do is have two concerts a year. One at Christmas and one at Easter. And they have to be religious concerts. Father Myron does that. Here’s how God is so amazing. Father Myron started an order of Priests over there. He also started an order of nuns. And the nun that he has as a Superior - she went to a Benedictine college in Kansas. And she majors in music. So, she puts these concerts on for the Russian people. Religious concerts, not secular concerts. And then they get their money for the Pro-Life homes. Putin gives money now to have children. At one time, Russia was the worst in the world with 50 million babies killed because of abortion, back in the time of the Soviet Union. That’s how staggering it was at one time. And they’re heading towards the goodness of God. I would not be surprised in a few years if abortion is outlawed in Russia as is homosexual marriage, as is transgender mutilation. It’s mandatory now in the public schools of Russia to read the bible. That’s why Satan doesn’t know what exactly is up, but he sees this movement in Russia towards God. That’s why he demonizes Russia – tries to stir the war drums.

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the Saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Louise: I draw great consolation in reading the bible when our Lord said, “Blessed are they who have not seen, but still believe.” Everything I’ve had happen is been through faith, but not actually seeing. For him to say it, he doesn’t say anything casually. I feel as though that living in faith, is a higher level than to be shown things. And a lot of times people are shown things because there’s a weakness of faith there. They need that, so God will give it to them. The more they go downhill, the more they that’s what’s going to help them to come back. And I always tell them about this book I read, and this monk that had the Blessed Mother appear to them, I always tell them, “If somebody told me that on the other side of that door, that the Blessed Mother was there, I wouldn’t go over and look.” There’s a price to pay. Anytime any extraordinary [divine phenomenon] happens in our life, you have to pay a price for it. The price is suffering. You live in faith, you accept everything, there’s nothing you have to pay a price for. Like Lourdes, St Bernadette had to pay a price. In the City of God, it says through our Lord his humanity had to pay a price. He himself received the Eucharist. His humanity took on the Glory of what he was giving. He had to pay a price. The humble, little old lady that just goes to church, their life is the easiest because of that. But to be Saints, they had to pay a price.

Alvin: And didn’t Jesus tell us, if you’re going to be my disciple, you have to pick up your cross, and come follow me...that doesn’t sound like a picnic.

Louise: Look at the price they [the Apostles] had to pay – for being with him for three years and what they were called to, they absolutely had to pay a price. And same way with the Blessed Mother - and Saint Theresa the little flower, how she said, “I don’t want to go to heaven and just be happy and do nothing. I want to do work. I want to help people here on earth.” So, what kind of death did she have to suffer because of her great desire? And she

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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had a mentally ill superior who gave her nothing for her suffering. And she had to die the death of our Lord where she couldn't breathe. So, there she paid the price. See? Everything has a price.

Alvin: The price of Love is pain for living with our Lord.

Louise: I was upset about God for a while and I read about her suffering. To be Saints, they had to pay a price. There has to be a price for everything that is good, which startled me when I was young and joined the Legion of Mary and I had little children and I went out two hours every week visiting people in the Parish. But I had to pay a price. As you become aware of it, you get used to it. And you just ride with it.

Alvin: Just to tell you how our postulate kind of got started, through the blessed sacrament, it's January 6<sup>th</sup>, which is a little Christmas in the Eastern Catholic, the Lord said to me, "Go and build the city of God on Mary's land." So, I'm thinking, what's that? A couple of weeks later, there was this periodical. I was going out for the children to get the medicine for their medicine at night. And this periodical said, "Gentleman's Estate is for Sale." We went and bought the property to make a long story short. And my son was here growing potatoes. I said to him, "go down four inches deep and plant a potato. So, he must have gone down like a foot digging in the ground and out of the ground, he took this brick out and it said [embossed on the brick] "St Mary's Land." So, I said, I think we're on to something here. So, one thing has led to another. We have Saint Faustina's Chapel; a Mercy Garden and we're building a five hundred-seat pavilion in honor of our Blessed Mother's triumph. So, you see, were really walking by faith, not by sight because a lot of times, during the course of this coming to fruition, there was a lot of darkness, you doubt yourself – you think you're losing your mind – you ask, "Did you really say this to me?" So, you're really walking by faith, almost like Abraham because God wanted something, even to the point

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

where he was going to sacrifice his son to get a point across of like what God is always doing in each and every one of our lives. It doesn't make us privileged. As a matter of fact, it's a heavier burden. It is placed upon you, because the more you have been given, the more you're going to be answerable for.

The interview ended and I began taking photos of the relics they brought in for me to see. The family was in a happy mood and all of us departed together as headed to the church parking lot.

### ***Interview 6***

Loretta is a 66-year-old woman of Italian-American descent. She was raised in Staten Island, NY and currently resides in Bloomingburg, NY within Sullivan County, New York. Loretta stated she and her husband are moving from Bloomingburg but did not want to move far away as her husband has many close ties to people in the area. He also has a disabled brother that they assist and they moved from Brooklyn to Orange County, NY which eventually led to Sullivan County. Loretta worked for the State. However, her daughter lives in Pennsylvania (within Lord's Valley). She has been regularly attending church since baptism. Her current declaration of religion therefore is Roman Catholic. Loretta had left the Church for some years and went back later in adulthood 22 years ago (1999). Here is her story beginning when she went back to her faith and walked into the new church, she joined for the first time.

Loretta: I think that when I walked in, I felt so at home. Coming from the City [New York], where there's like 10 masses on a weekend, and the Priest doesn't even know who you are because there are so many people unless you're involved in the church. And if you're working and have kids, you don't always have time, you don't always have time to volunteer. You're lucky you get the kids to church! So, I always felt like I was just shuffling

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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through in the church – herding through with the rest of the cattle – that’s how I felt. When I came up here [Middletown, NY area in Orange County, NY] I walked in and I felt I’m at home. And that was very, very important to me. That was very important.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Loretta: Yes, Saint Padre Pio’s glove [Figure 11]. And this box [opening the wooden cigar-sized box] was my father-in-law’s. And this box – he kept it [the glove] in here. It [the box] was broken, was glued, everything. People would try to give him and buy him these beautiful new boxes. When he passed away, we found six boxes empty boxes which my husband said, “I can use that for cigars!” So, this is the original box it was in and will always stay in as far as I’m alive. And there’s other relics in here. So, this is the Padre Pio glove and you can touch it if you like. Then I have other relics in here.

Interviewer: On examining the glove in my own hands, I noticed the faint aroma of a sweet-smelling perfume – much like the smell of roses. I noticed the aroma and mentioned this to Loretta.

Loretta: That’s from Padre Pio – roses! So, in here also, is a piece of Padre Pio’s bedsheet [Figure 12] and veil [Figure 13] that touched Padre Pio’s face after his death. So that’s what this is. This is part of the bedsheet. So, this was from someone. The woman who originally obtained them was named Concetta Gambella. She passed. Padre Pio passed in 1968 I believe. She went to go see him during the late 50’s or early 60’s. I didn’t know her. She had passed before I came to the glove.

Loretta: What happened was, my father-in-law, - it’s such a weird story – my father in-law worked for Kleinfelds in Brooklyn – the Bridal Shop [Kleinfeld Bridal]. There was this parking lot at Saint Anselm’s Roman Catholic Church. So, St Anselm’s Church used to

## Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles

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let Kleinfeld [department store] park the customer's cars there because in Brooklyn you couldn't get a spot. So, they would say, "Park in Saint Anselm's Church parking lot." and my father in-law was the parking attendant. So, she went to Padre Pio. Padre Pio could read people's heart. So, he would do confessions for twenty hours a day. People would line up forever to go to confession. So, she was from Italy – born in Italy, came to America. She was Americanized. When she went to go see him, it was in July, it was the heat of the Summer in Italy and she went with a short sleeve shirt and he said to her, "what a disgrace you are" in Italian, and she understood everything he said. "What a disgrace you are coming to me with your arms showing." She did her confession and she left there, hysterical, crying. When she walked outside, the nuns saw her and asked, "What's wrong? Why are you crying?" And she told them what happened. They said, "Wait here." The nun came back and said, "Come tomorrow. Come back tomorrow." When she went back, she met Padre Pio and he gave her the glove because the nuns saw her crying. That's how she got this. Back then, you didn't show your arms – you didn't show your bare arms in Italy. In America they did. Women wouldn't go into church with their arms exposed. So, my father in-law – like I said – was at Saint Anselm's Church parking lot. He was at church every single day. And he knew her son. And my father in-law was very religious. She left him [when she passed], my father in-law, the glove in her will. He got the glove. And he did amazing work with it, as much as he could – he was older.

Loretta: He stopped driving. But in that church, he had like a little house – like a shelter in case it would rain, so he could go in there. He had a heater, and fan in the summer. And he made it a shrine to Padre Pio, and Frank Sinatra! So, when he passed away, we had to go get the stuff out of this little shed. I was like, what was he thinking putting Padre Pio and Frank Sinatra together?! [laughs]. So, people would come to the parking lot to get the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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glove. He would have it with him all the time. So, he had a book – someone made it – someone sewed it and made it for him. People wrote everything like what they wanted to say to Padre Pio, thanking him and all. I have something in here myself and from my sister. I want to get a new book for people [to write their thoughts in] but I don't want this one to be out of here [pointing to the original box]. I want that to be in here. It's the book of thoughts – of people's writings and asking, and thanking. I sit sometimes and just read them and I say I hope these people were granted what they asked for. It makes you cry because people are asking for help for other people, for themselves, for their families, for their kids. So here, is the little boy I told you about. We'll get to that.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Loretta: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Was it just Padre Pio or was it to others?

Loretta; I pray to Saint Padre Pio, to the Virgin Mary, I pray to Saint Anthony. Those are the three big [most significant] saints I pray to.

Interviewer: How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Loretta: Every day - Daily.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Loretta: Yes, absolutely. The help that I turn to is Padre Pio. The first time was for my sister. My sister was 50 years old and she was diagnosed with emphysema. When her son was born when she was 41, she had her first child. Yeah, she was very late. Got married late in life, got pregnant right away and she was diagnosed at 41 with emphysema. At 50, she went into like a diabetic coma because the medication she was taking, prednisone, gave her diabetes. So, she went into a coma and she always said that she didn't want to have a

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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tracheotomy. Well, she went into this coma and they were able to get her out of the diabetic coma, and the doctor told her that if she didn't have the tracheotomy, that she was going to die. She couldn't live without the trachea. So, we all talked to her and said to her, "You have a young son – you have to [do this] you know." So, when she agreed and signed the paper, the doctor took us outside. It was me, my other sister, and my father. My mother had passed away when she was 50. So, the three of us were there and the doctor told us statistically, because of infection, with the tracheotomy, she has one year to live. And that's when I prayed to Padre Pio on a daily basis to please let my sister live until her son understands and will remember her with good thoughts and memories. And she lived six more years – five years after she was supposed to. And she didn't die from the emphysema. She had a blood clot and traveled to her heart. It was not related, but because of all the medication, and not getting up out of bed and not exercising. She was on the ventilator at that point, and she was in a nursing home because my father couldn't take care of her. It's a long story. Her husband left her when she got sick – when she started needing the oxygen – he couldn't deal with it and he left her and the baby. It was terrible – it was awful. But she had a good family.

Loretta: My father had three girls. And my father was not a wealthy man but he died to me as a King because he took care of us! Took care of our children no matter what – he was there for us. So, he was helping my sister and then he got sick. He had cancer at 45 on the spine. He had major surgery – at the time, only fourteen surgeons in the entire world were able to do the surgery. His doctor perfected the surgery down in NYU hospital in the city. So, he was sick, but he overcame that. And the cancer was taken out from the spine and he was good for thirty something years and the cancer came back. So, he was taking care of my nephew while my sister was on the ventilator. He had taken my nephew to school and doing everything for them. Then my father got sick and couldn't take care of her anymore.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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So, we had to put her in a nursing home where she could get that care she needed. So, she was on a vent unit, but she was up, awake and was able to talk and communicate. And when my father got sick, she wound up in that nursing home. And in the nursing home, they try to give the best care they can – they are overwhelmed and everything else. But she wasn't exercising. Wasn't moving around. They didn't have physical therapy. They didn't have that stuff. So, she developed blood clots. And they were trying to put in a filter in her heart so it wouldn't come through or were afraid she wouldn't be able to sustain the surgery because of the ventilator. So, they were planning on doing it but they never go to do it. In the nursing home, she had excellent care. The people there were good to her. She was getting ready to go see my father who was in ICU. So, a van was going to come and pick her up and take her to the hospital. She was in a wheelchair. She had a portable vent with her. And she said to the nurse, "Can you give me change for a twenty-dollar bill - because I want to tip the bus driver." So, the nurse went, she went to get the change and came back and my sister was on the floor dead. They tried to revive her – they couldn't – she was 56 years old. I'm the middle one. She was the oldest and I have a younger sister.

Loretta continued: I'm so blessed by who raised me and how my family lived. We live in different places right now. We get together once a month for a family dinner because you need to stay close to your family. You need your family. My son – I don't know where he's at. But my daughter – her and I are very close – very close to the family. She adored my father. She took it the hardest. That was his only granddaughter. He had grandsons; she was his everything.

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Loretta; Absolutely. To me, just the smell of [here Loretta stopped and refocused her thoughts.] I'll tell you what happened to me. This gentleman, Pauley, I told you about over the phone, he takes the glove and does wonderful works with it. When I get this glove back and it's in my possession, in my home, my home takes on a different feeling because I know the glove is with me. I take on a different feeling when this glove is in my possession. It's a wonderful feeling. It's a comforting feeling.

Loretta: So, I told you about this gentleman named Pauley who takes the glove down to Jersey. I was on the phone with him the other day for about an hour and fifteen and he started telling me some stories of his experiences. I said, "Pauley you have to write them down." He goes, "I can't they're mine." He used to go down to Ocean City, New Jersey. He would go down there often. And one day he went down he got this urge to pray. And it was Padre Pio. And he [Pauley] said "no!" "Get on your knees and pray!" And he got on his knees and started praying. And then he said he felt this urge to go to church. So, when he walked into the church, all these people were praying to Padre Pio. So, he said to one of the people, "I have a friend – he has a glove. He has a Padre Pio glove." "He does? they asked. "Could you bring it to us?" He said, "I'll ask him for it." And there his journey started. The night when he went down there with the glove, Padre Pio came to him in a bubble – in the image of a bubble. And the bubble broke and he woke up. He was saturated [with water]. So now he starts this journey of going to all these churches down in Jersey. He said, "Loretta, I wanted to go down to the shore and open a pizzeria. That's all I wanted!" This happened to him in 2003. He said, "That's all I wanted to do is go down and open a pizzeria down there. I didn't want to get involved in this. This wasn't where I was at."

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Loretta continued: He told me he at one time was driving and he didn't know where he was going or what he was doing. But he had the glove with him but he didn't know where he was supposed to go and he got a phone call [on his cell phone]. He was just driving down – he didn't know where he was going. He was on the Garden State Parkway. He had no rhyme or reason why he even wound up on the Garden State Parkway. And he got a phone call from one of the women that he became close with, with the glove and she said, "There's a friend of mine who's at a hospital with a friend of hers that does not believe. But she's dying. And she'd like you to go there and bring the glove." So, he went. He went into the hospital room. The woman was lying in the bed – she was still alive. And her friend was there. And he started praying and he took the glove out and touched her with the glove. When he touched her with the glove, he also had Holy Oil. And when he touched her with the Holy Oil and glove, purple lights starting shooting all over the room. And the woman said [the friend in the room] "What are you doing, what are you doing with that?!" The woman that was sick, smiled and she passed away. So now he got so upset but it was a good thing because he felt she was at peace. He put her at peace. So now he gets upset because he saw these purple lights. He never experienced that before. And he was really upset about it. He leaves the hospital alone. He gets down to the parking lot but he forgot he left the glove in the hospital room. So now he said, "I had to go back! When I go back, the woman is still in the room in bed. Her friend is still there. When I walked into the room, I felt the energy of madness. They were angry. It was like the Devil - I know it was the Devil because I blessed her. And he [the Devil] wanted her to die and go to Hell. And she's not going." He said it was because she was blessed – so Padre Pio saved her. And the Devil was angry. He said there such a bad energy in the room. He said he felt anger in the room. The woman - the friend in the room, did touch the glove. They prayed together also. She said to him, "What

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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did you do? How did those purple lights appear?” Pauley said, “I can’t answer you.” And he took the glove and left because he didn’t know what to say to her. He never experienced anything like that before.

Interviewer: After a pause, Loretta continued.

Loretta: I’ll tell you another story with him (Pauley). He really does wonderful work with the glove, he really does. He was never a true believer until the experience of Padre Pio coming to him and telling him to pray. So, he’s connected with this woman. Going back and forth with the glove down in Ocean City. So, her, her mother, and her friend are renting an Air B&B in Italy. They’re going there for two weeks, three weeks, whatever. They’re going to go to Saint Giovanna. They’re going to go all over Italy. Her girlfriend calls her and says she can’t go. She has to cancel. She calls Pauly and says to Pauly, “My friend cancelled Italy. Do you want to come with me and my mother? We’re gonna go, this is what we’re gonna do,” and he said “Yes!” She said to Paul, “All you have to do is pay for your airfare. The room is paid for.” He tells her he is going. He tells me – they’re going all over [Italy]. So, they’re in the town now where Padre Pio was.

[Interviewer: San Giovanni Rotondo is in the south of Italy. The church is dedicated to the Lady of Graces. Padre Pio arrived there in July, 1916. At that time, there was only a small convent in the woods that was established in 1358. In 1648, it was dedicated to Our Lady of Graces. The current church, Santa Maria de Gracia, was built on the site of the old church and convent in 1956.]

Loretta: And now they’re in the church praying. So now, he decides he’s gonna take a walk because he wants to see what the building was that Padre Pio lived in. So, when he knocked on the door, a priest answered and he [Pauley] said, “What is this building? Is this

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Padre Pio's?" The priest said "No, this is a home for retired priests." So, it was a very small home for priests who were retired. He said to Pauley, "My name is Father Rudolph, and I'm going take you on a special tour." So, he [Pauly] said, "He's gonna take me on this special tour. I was in the room where Padre Pio slept." He said, "I could smell him [Padre Pio]. But on the other side, there was a great window. And on this other side were all these people looking in who couldn't get to the room. And there were all these people behind the glass window and all the people were on the other side. He then took me to his bedroom – he took me to all these rooms and I could see the people as they were on the tour. I felt so special with him being behind this glass." They finished the tour. They say goodbye. He goes back to the church. And he said to the priest, "Thank you so much for allowing me to have this special tour of Padre Pio's residence. Father Rudolph gave me the tour." The Priest said, "There's no Father Rudolph in that home [the home of the retired priests]. There's no Father Rudolph living in that home." Pauley said "Maybe it was Father Padre Pio himself - I don't know who it was!"

Interviewer: Loretta, waiting for my reaction to this story, had paused momentarily. When she could see the look of surprise on my face, she continued.

Loretta; So, if you ever come across a dollar bill and it's stamped, and it says "Pray, Hope and don't worry," that's Pauley! He stamps all his money. He bought a stamp saying Pray, Hope, Don't Worry. That's Padre Pio's saying. He [Pauly] had a company that flew banners. They flew Pray, Hope, Don't Worry. So, he's sitting in Jersey, down on the shore on the beach and waiting for the plane to come by. The next thing, here comes the plane. So, here's a kid saying, "Mommy, Mommy, what does that mean – pray, hope, don't worry?" She told him- "If you pray to God, you have to have hope, and wherever you're going, don't

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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worry – God will take care of it.” Pauly turned around and it’s this twelve-year-old boy and his mother is in a wheelchair. He’s pushing his mother in the wheelchair! The company started flying it for free because people would call up and ask, “Who’s flying that?” This woman was very persistent and wanted to know who it was. And the company called Pauly. They said, “Listen, this woman wants to speak to you.” He said, “Okay, give her my number.” She called Pauly and thanked him because she was going to commit suicide that day and she said, “I knew that was meant for me and I want to thank you for doing that.” He’s touched many, many lives – with the glove, the banner – he’s really done so many things. All he wanted to do was open a pizzeria on the Jersey shore, but God has him on this journey – but he loves it. He’s probably 64 or 65 years old.

Loretta pulled out another medal from the box that contains the Padre Pio glove, the book of thoughts, and other small relics and miscellaneous religious items and continued talking.

Loretta: So, this here is Alan. And Alan is now an almost six foot tall, thirteen-year-old boy. I was introduced to his mother. And this is just a cross and picture of him. Alan was this young [pointing to the picture] when his mother met me and the glove. Alan had heart disease. He had a very rare heart disease. He was going to Columbian Presbyterian Hospital [New York-Presbyterian Columbia University Irving Medical Center, in New York City] and he had to wear a backpack for the medication for him to live. And when she [Alan’s mother] came to my house – she lives like five minutes from me – she came to my house and we prayed and we rubbed it [the glove] on his chest and we said some prayers. She took him back to Columbia from within a month from that. “The doctors at Columbia were astonished!” Those are the words she told me – that the doctor was astonished that he was

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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healing. Today, he doesn't carry anything. He takes oral medication and he's doing wonderful.

Interviewer: Loretta then pointed to other medals and continued telling me more about Padre Pio.

Loretta: People gave these medals to be with Padre Pio [meaning the medals were intended to be kept with the glove]. So, this story – this I love. This is something I put in there. I was working for the State of New York and those are her two nephews. This woman comes in and I see she has on a Padre Pio bracelet. So, I ask her, “Are you a follower of Padre Pio?” She said yes. I said, “I have a glove – one of Padre Pio's gloves.” She said, “Do you think I could have it?” I said, “I really don't give it to anyone. I'll bring it somewhere, but I don't give it.” I promise, she said, “I will return it.” So, I met her and she took it. Something came over me and said let her take it – you can trust her. She takes the Padre Pio glove to her sister's house – to her two nephews. They're sitting there talking. And her son – something happened and he had to be rushed to the hospital and he had this very rare surgery on his heart. She said, Padre Pio was there that day with them when he had like this heart attack. She said, he saved him [her nephew]. So, I put their pictures in here [showing me the locket] and I keep it with Padre Pio [the glove]. She said it was because of Padre Pio, that he is still alive.

Interviewer: I mentioned to Loretta that there appears to be an ongoing theme here with Padre Pio – occurrences having to do with the heart. Loretta agreed. After a small bit of conversation about other saints and what they are known for helping with, Loretta continued with another story.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Loretta: I meet this woman – it's his grandmother [pointing to another photograph] and for some reason, I don't know why, but her and I connect – we become instant friends. She says, "Loretta, I want to have something at my house (and she wrote a letter to me about her experience) with the Padre Pio glove. There are a few people who want to see it. I said yes, sure. She said, my granddaughter – her hair keeps falling out. She's a young kid – maybe nine years old. She said she wears hats now. She's a beautiful kid and I want to put it [the glove] on her head. Absolutely I said, no problem. Since that day, her hair grew back. She has this thick, beautiful hair. There's a miracle that happens every single day. But the heart [of others] is not open. [Here, Loretta is referring to non-believers.] You have to be open. [Discussion then turned to Loretta's husband.]

Loretta: He was fifty years old. We have eight acres of property. Six of them are mow-able. So, he's mowing the property. I'd come home from work and he'd just be getting off the tractor. I come home one day and he's sitting on the chair on the patio. The tractor is right next to him. I ask, "What's wrong with you?" He goes, "I can't get up! I can't do anything I'm so weak." I asked what did you do? He said, "I don't know. I'll be alright, just get me something to drink, I'll be okay." And he felt better. He got up, put the tractor away and everything. Now he's having these experiences more and more. It's his heart. [I asked Elena if she exposed the glove to him and she said "yes, absolutely."] He had a birth defect in his heart – from birth! He never knew it. He was a marathon runner! Never knew he had this heart problem. So, he goes to the doctor, and they say, "You have a hole in your heart." That was the first thing. I tell him, we got to go to somebody else. So, we go down to Lennox Ville hospital – to Doctor Summers – what a doctor! Dr Summers is the best! He finds what's wrong but he can't fix it. He repairs holes in hearts. He says he has not a hole in his heart, but has red blood where blue blood is going. He said this is a birth defect

that needs to be taken care of immediately. So, he goes to the doctor now that's going to do the surgery.

Loretta: There are three doctors. He picks this one particular doctor – Dr Wynn. He goes to him – he fixes it. He's perfectly good. We come home and he is saying, "I don't know, something is wrong." People who have open heart surgery have these phantom feelings. It's all the nerves, things not healed, stuff like that. So, he's telling me, Something's wrong. It's not healing. I say "How do you know that?" He says he has to go to the doctor. He goes up there and gets a Cat Scan. The doctor comes and tells him, "We have to do surgery in three days, that's not healing - you need a mesh on your chest." I say, "You're not having surgery in three days." I called Dr Wynn. Dr Wyn was a pediatric cardiologist. A pediatric cardiologist had to do this. He [Loretta's husband] was the oldest one in Mt Sinai Hospital to ever have this done. He was in pediatric ward. Dr Wynn is saying what is happening to him. All reports were overnighted to Dr Wynn. He calls the next day and says, "Michael, there's nothing wrong with you! They don't see what I see. You're perfectly okay." "I wanna come in and see you" [says Loretta's husband]. He goes down to the hospital to see Dr Wynn. Dr Winn says, "Michael, stay away from doctors." He says, "Look at me – I had to have brain surgery." I said, "Wait, wait, wait – you had to have brain surgery and you're still performing surgeries on babies now?" Yes, he said. I said, "God wanted that to happen to you. You're here because of God." He says, "I know that." I said, "Because you perform miracles every day on those babies!" He goes, "The baby's heart is as big as a nickel." So, my husband has been through heart surgery, two back surgeries, two foot surgeries, so maybe recently, he's starting to believe. He was an altar boy – went to Catholic Church, Catholic school – the whole thing. Something happened – I don't know what it is

but something happened and he totally turned off from the church. He totally turned away from the church. So, I pray for him.

Interviewer: At this point, Loretta asked if I wanted to take pictures of her artifactual relics. I agreed and she proceeded to pull out a photograph of Padre Pio praying next to a window taken by Concetta Maria Gambello when she was in Italy.

Loretta then remembered a story about the glove from Padre Pio. While turning the glove over to reveal the palm side, she pointed out that the item was stitched. Here is her story why.

Loretta: You see this here? It's sewed, right? So, somebody sewed this on here like it's supposed to be where the blood was [the small red patch stitched to the glove – Figure 14]. This is fraying here so I get nervous now about that. But someone cut the glove right in here [pointing to the corner between the thumb and index finger]. Someone took a snip of it, right? So, everybody that my father in-law knew – all these men that hung out with my father in-law, there was this one guy they didn't trust. And they said he did it – he cut the glove. When my father in-law died, the priest said, "Now that Joe and Father Travis are gone, (because he spoke of the glove during the funeral Mass) and a father was dying of cancer and the priest said – now that they're all gone, I can share with you that it wasn't Pete who cut the glove - it was Father --- [name omitted] because he was dying and wanted a piece of it. Everybody in church was surprised because they were all blaming this guy, Pete!

Interviewer: Loretta then showed me another relic belonging to Padre Pio a small decorative encased relic containing a bone fragment [Figure 15]. After photographing the various items stored in the box, Loretta continued on with another story.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Loretta; My daughter, when she was little, would wake me up and say to me, that there were spirits in the house. And I'd say to her, "Lisa – please go back to bed you're making me crazy. You have to go to school; I have to go to work - go back to bed." And she'd say, "Don't you see them? Look at them right there!" pointing in the corner of her bedroom. "They're singing! don't you hear them?" And I'd say, "No, I don't, please go back to bed!" I got so upset I took her to the priest and we met with the priest and the priest explained to her about spirits. She wasn't satisfied with it. She was not terrified or scared – never terrified but she wasn't satisfied with what the priest said. And I sort of suppressed what she was saying. I didn't want to hear it. I didn't know what it was. I didn't know how to handle it. So, we prayed but she still kept seeing those spirits. They kept coming and singing. So, I say, "I don't know what to do with her." Well, she always had this energy and her and my father were always close. He was the only granddaughter. We drove down to Staten Island to see him because I knew if I took my father out of the hospital, he was never coming back to the house. So, I took her to see him. She said to him, "Pop, you have to come to me. Please come to me. If anything happens to you, please let me know you're okay and come to me." And we left there and she was devastated. She couldn't talk in the ride. All she could do was cry.

Loretta: My father and sister died within six months of each other. My sister died in December. My nephew went to go live with my daughter. So now, she had Salvatore, whom my father raised. And she had him. So, my sister died six months later than my father died. So now, Salvatore is living with Lisa and the kids were at school and they had a half a day. So, my daughter was home. She said she left the house, cleared the messages on [message recorder]. She still has it. She picks up Salvatore off the school bus and all go out to Middletown. She says they get home. Salvatore had to go into the bathroom. The kids went

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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downstairs to play. She hit the recording playback because there was a blinking. She played the recording and the voice said, “I miss you.” Salvatore from the bathroom said, “That’s Pop!” And my daughter said, “Sal, be quiet!” and she started screaming for the kids. She said [to the kids] sit on the bed and listen to this. The three of them sat on the bed, Sal was older – he was there. She played the recording and the kids said, “That’s Pop!” So, she got the phone and she looked for the caller ID. There were no calls. But it was very staticky and the voice said, “I miss you.” I got goose bumps. So, she calls me at work and said listen to it and I said, “Lisa, that is definitely my father’s voice.” So, I call my husband and he said, “You’re crazy. You’re all crazy.” I asked, “Can you go over there and calm her down please?” He goes over and she says, “Listen to this.” She plays it and he calls me and says, “It’s your father.” This happened when she was living up here so this happened ten years ago.

Loretta continued: I live in a house that was built in 1840. She comes to my house and says there’s spirits in this house. I said, “Please don’t start, leave me alone.” One night, my husband wakes me up and says, “Get up, get up – there’s somebody sitting in the hallway.” When you come up my steps, there’s a bench with two windows you can sit in front of. So, he said, “He’s sitting on the ledge.” “What are you talking about, I ask? I said I have to go to work.” I open the door and say there’s nobody there. “Please stop – there’s nobody there. You saw him, okay, I’m going back to bed now.” My daughter calls me one day. Every time she came to my house, she sensed something, and the dog wouldn’t go upstairs. Her dog wouldn’t go upstairs. She would be shaking every time she went up. I’d take her up by hand when she was little. She didn’t want to be up there. I put her down, she’d run right down the steps. So, one day my daughter calls my house. And a man answers the phone. And it’s like very elderly and shaky [mimics the voice]. And she goes, “Who is

this?” The voice says, “You know who I am.” My daughter said, “Put my mother on the phone!” He kept saying to her, “You know who I am” and she hung up the phone. Now, she said, she pressed re-dial. She didn’t dial the number. She pressed redial. I answered and said hello. She goes, “Mom, there’s a man in your house. I just called you – there’s a man in your house!” I said, “I’m home here by myself – there’s nobody here!” So, I walked through the whole house. I said to her, “There’s no man in my house.” There’s one phone upstairs and I go up to see – there’s no man in the house! She said, “He answered your phone!” She believes it’s the man she kept feeling [sensing]. My husband said, “I told you there’s somebody here!” I never saw the man – never felt anything and I still don’t today but my daughter does. Then she’d say to me, “Stop buying those antiques, because you’re buying dead people’s stuff and they’re in your house now.”

The interview segued into remotely related discussion on the supernatural – what theorists today label as the paranormal, oracles, and mediums we have both met in our time. I had also taken a photograph of a rare original photo of Padre Pio that Loretta kept with the glove [Figure 16]. Since the interview, Loretta and I have stayed in contact with each other, texting each other occasionally and saying hello. I had even contacted her to make arrangements for a friend of mine to have Padre Io’s glove taken to a hospital in the Bronx in the hopes of helping my friend’s wife (Mary) who was in critical condition. The glove I had later learned helped my friend’s wife to awake, and speak to her husband, daughter and family members in the room. She told her family that she was in no pain and was waiting to meet others in her family that had already passed on. She told them all to be strong and not sad, but to be happy for her. I was contacted later that evening that Mary had passed away.

***Interview 7***

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

My next interview was with Phil, a fifty-seven-year-old chemist whose family originates from eastern Europe. His father emigrated from Gleezi, located in Carpathia area. Phil is a third-generation citizen and serves as Laity for an Eastern Orthodox church in the Weymart, PA area. Phil was raised in the Clarkes Summit area and has been regularly attending church his whole life. He is a very cheerful individual and is the same age as I. I found Phil to be a very intelligent man and a deep thinker as you will now discover.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics:

Phil: Not at home. All of them are located in church.

Interviewer: Name of Saint or Martyr associated with relic(s) that you seek for intercession?

Phil: St Herman of Alaska [Figure 17], and Saint Basil [Figure 18, and 19].

Interviewer: How Often do you pray, venerate the Saint or Martyr?

Phil: Twice a week.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Phil: Not For me, I was raised in the church so there was nothing really life changing.

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while using relics in prayer or during the time of need?

Phil: I had some interesting experiences. I was over in Russia when it was breaking up. It was less than a month before the change occurred in Moscow. You could see that it was all crumbling. It was just in Moscow itself that it was still intact. I was in St Petersburg at the Saint Xenia church and they have like a tomb there. It's a mausoleum you could call it. We were on a small tour group - eight of us total. It was mid-July. We went to the earliest Liturgy there was. It was probably 7 in the morning. We couldn't go on any of the tour groups because it was so early yet. I gotten to the church. And there's this gigantic cemetery around the church. You could actually go inside. She was there - she was actually there!

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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She was dressed in gray. It was this old woman. How she got in? She just showed up. It was very peaceful. When it was taking place, we kind of just looked at each other. Afterwards, when we were walking around the cemetery later on, we said, “That was Saint Xenia!” Because from icons of her, we recognized her. She kind of like just nodded. She made some motions. She nodded her head. It was totally out of the blue. As I said, it was around the time the Soviet Union was collapsing. And when we went, one of our tour guides was interested in her grandmother who was Orthodox. She of course was raised in the Communist era. She heard we were going to the Monastery of Pochaev. And she asked the bus driver if he could drive her home because she wanted to change her clothes. While she was there [at the Monastery] she was asking one of the monks about becoming Orthodox. She was telling us regarding Pochaev, that when Stalin was in power, someone would talk about the how all of the monks were put into the caves would go to sleep. But they’re preserved. He was trying to come up for some scientific explanation for us. So, Stalin took all the bodies out. These are preserved whole bodies. He put them out in the field. They were in the sun and he figured they would decompose. They didn’t.

Interviewer: Phil went on describing his visit to Russia.

Phil: The Cathedral of Christ the Savior was blown up by the Soviets. Stalin had the place blown up to put in this huge communist office building. Twice they started building it and twice it caved in. They actually declared the ground to be unstable and you couldn’t actually build on it. So, they put a big, huge swimming pool there. Right after communism ended, they rebuilt the cathedral. When you’re present in a country even though the communist tried to do what they did, it’s just amazing to see the faith of the people. And it was things like relics that kept them to the church. It was something tangible for them. I

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

understood what relics were in an intellectual way, but I didn't understand the deep-seated place they would have in people's lives.

Phil: It's interesting. We live in a very materialistic society. Communism was total materialism in a sense. When people had nothing from that, with what the communists were offering, this could be why they were turning to that as a thing. And they actually found something spiritual in the material. That's what hit me when I was over there. And it really deepened my faith. There's actually a presence. I think that best way I could actually explain it, with relics, is there's like this presence of something beyond here. From our perspective, we see ordinary life. But there are two ways to explain it. These people living here were touched by holiness. Like in the Acts of the Apostles- people wanted to touch the garments of Peter, even the shadow because it was something tangible. The same thing with iconography. There's something to it – it's visual but there's something beyond the icon. And that's what I think what it is with the relics. That somehow, something – if you want to use the word 'dimension', has touched and they defy our understanding of materialism. They don't decompose. There's relics of Saint Herman which was given to us by metropolitan Theodosius. He was a bishop in Alaska before he was renovated. He passed away not too long ago. He gave us those relics we have. During lent season, he would just show up – not want to be treated any special way. He explained his time in Alaska. I think it's the simple people up there and these things touch them – the faith. There's actually a story of Saint Innocent when he was in Alaska – before he came, one of the medicine men foreseen his coming. And when he came, he basically pointed out Saint Innocent to the people and he ended up being baptized and everything else.

Phil: Somehow the things are touched in our world in a way you don't understand it. But it happens. I think with the tangible, over in Russia, people had something to hold onto –

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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something that connected them to their ancestors. Just speaking with people, you could tell the faith was there even though they were not allowed to worship openly as their ancestors had. By the time we were there it was just all crumbling and I'm wondering if that's the reason when everything started to collapse. The Soviets tried to mimic everything out of religion – the way they did their state weddings. The thing is, there's this religious need in a sense of people and I think the State tried to replace the religion.

Interviewer: Does being a chemist challenge any faith or belief you may hold?

Phil: I don't separate them at all - faith from objectivity. What happened to me when I was going through college and everything else, even high school, there's always been this tension between faith and reason. In my understanding now, is that you have analogous sets. You have God the Father; you have the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is reason, the Holy Spirit is the sense of Faith. In other words, Christ became incarnate. The idea of seeing, touching, with all of our senses. St Gregory the theologian has this analogy saying God the Father is the actual Sun. The light from the Sun is the Son. And the heat from the Sun is the Holy Spirit. In my understanding of science which is just simply knowledge, is with reason – Christ is the Alpha / Omega. Christ is also the Logos, So, in a sense, he is the reason. And the Holy Spirit is the Faith. In the original liturgy back in Saint James, to put heated water into the chalice – “Zia” it was called. What the priest says when you're putting heated water into the chalice is “the Warmth, the Faithful of the Holy Spirit.” From a scientific point of view, I've heard even priests say this. They heat the water because it could have been contaminated. They had no idea back then about bacteria. They heated it – there was a reason for it. It was directed – it was revealed. I understand the liturgy – just as Moses went up the mountain and gotten the ten commandments – he was also told to do a number of other things such as how to worship. I understand that's where the liturgy came from in the same

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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way – the liturgy of the Old Testament which developed into the liturgy of the New Testament. So, with science and faith, they inform each other – for me. There’s stuff that doesn’t make sense, when I look at science. But then I refer to faith and it’s like maybe it’s not being seen the right way. I never actually separate them.

Interviewer: The model I see you describing is like a “Holy algebraic formula.”

Phil: It’s kind of like Faith can be blind too, in a sense. In other words, if you don’t understand how lightning forms, you can say God is angry and is zapping things and people. That could be misinformed too. The thing is, science is also at times (as you see science develop over time) is misinformed. My reference to this is, if you look at Genesis. Darwin started in the seminary. And I can see when I’m reading Darwin, I can see where he’s coming from. He took stuff right out of the bible! He used it as the model. From a chemist’s standpoint, it’s all built. There’s a person who wrote a book – he was actually an atheist from the University of Pennsylvania. It was called Darwin’s Blackbox.

Interviewer: [Darwin’s Blackbox was authored by Michael J. Behe who provides his conception of irreducible complexity. Behe, argues that its presence is in many biochemical systems on earth and therefore suggests that they must be the result not of evolutionary processes, but of intelligent design.]

Phil: He’s not from any Christian-Judea background at all. He just tears Darwin to pieces. From a chemist’s standpoint, Darwin is junk. You can from a biological perspective say this went from this to that. But from a chemistry perspective, that just doesn’t happen. To me, that’s where the faith -when you actually look at things from an atomical level and animal molecular level, this stuff does not stay together. I kind of want to say that these people want to open their eyes to the bigger picture. Because most people specialize in one area. And they’re focused so much on that area, they’re missing everything else that is going

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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on and if they see things at the very basic level, at the atomic level and cosmic level, from smallest to the biggest level you can get, there's something at work that science cannot explain. If you are familiar with thermodynamics, if you look at the Holy Spirit as that heat side of things, look at Jesus Christ the Sun as the light side of things, quantum mechanics meets thermodynamics, people have tried to desperately bring those two things together to come up with the master equation. From an equation, is that what they are really looking for?

Interviewer: Phil paused for a moment looking for words to describe his thoughts and continued.

Phil: Look at the rainbow and go back to the time of Noah. I ask myself a simple question: Was this in a sense the revelation of the trinity? I was working at the University of Stratton. Cardinal Keeler was there one time and I was talking to him. He asked, "Are you Orthodox by the way? You know, you guys have it right with the order – you do baptism, chrismation, and communion." In the time of Noah, the ark was understood to be in the water – the baptism idea. Well, that's more focused on Christ. The Patriarch will go into the Holy Sepulcher [in Jerusalem] on Holy Saturday, without any matches, without anything. And the candle will just light itself. He comes out, and people light their candles with it. The thing is, a lot of people's candles just light. They'll just light on their own. There's something about the flame that intrigues me. You can actually put your hand in the flame and not be burned. Eventually, it gets hot. To me, this is the understanding that Christ is the light, then the Holy Spirit is the heat. So back to Noah, the rainbow is the spectrum of visible light. But then you have what's below, and what's above – infrared, UV, in a sense to me, analogous to me, the part we see which is Christ, the rest we don't. What's interesting to me about that, is that there is there is a woman who painted the icon in a church not far from here, like ten minutes away. She drove out, I think from Ohio. She was in surgery and flatlined. Of course, she's an artist, and we were talking – she came to visit one time. And

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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she said where she was. There were only two colors from our world that she could recognize. One of the colors was magenta. Then she mentioned the other color. Everything else was a different color. Kind of like a bee sees UV. But what I'm getting at is there's so much more to light that we can't sense. And what's interesting in the light, we can see is seven colors.

Phil: Consider the idea of the procession of the Holy Spirit. In the Orthodox church, the original said the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, not from the Father and the Son – just from the Father. The Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world, but going back to the analogy of the Sun, the heat comes from the Sun. You play around with that triangle, you are basically putting the Father, the Son, ahead of the Holy spirit and tipping it upside down. What happened in the West during the time of Thomas Aquinas and those people? They took reason and put it at a higher level than faith. If you go back to that analogy of the triangle, if you put the father and son at the same level, the holy spirit proceeds from both of them. That means faith comes out of the reason. But then if you flip that around, you're saying reason comes out of faith. So, it was a natural thing for me. It was not anything that was philosophical – it was just a natural thing. I was raised in the church and I put science through that. My scientific inclination was there and when it comes back to relics, there's something there.

Phil: There's evidence of the world that we can't see. We can touch something that we know has been given to us that doesn't make sense from looking at it with a scientific perspective. The science says that a body should decompose and things should fall to pieces and go into chaos. The way I understand all of this on a bigger level, is entropy. Laws of thermodynamics says everything should be collapsing and falling into chaos. Well, what keeps it from doing that? If you say God, then you have to say if he's doing this, there's

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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evidence of him existing. But we can't see him – just like I've never seen an atom. From an outside perspective, we cannot see the entire cosmos either. But we know it's there. Regarding relics, they touch us. I ask as a scientist, why are they here? There are myrrh streaming icons which is also interesting from a chemist's perspective. It doesn't make any scientific sense. But does it? Like when you look at the Light, there's a lot more to light that you can see. And so, is this again, part of ...God created us as beings with five physical senses. Did he not want us to find him through these things? And to me, you use your reason enlightened by faith in a sense. But you don't have blind faith either.

Phil: I never went through the academics until later. And as I said, some of the academics didn't make sense to me. I personally never struggled with some of these things. I don't know why. I try to ask myself that questions – why – that the science, because I've always loved science since being a boy to figure out how things work. When I was doing anti-inflammatories, it is like being created. What's really interesting about it though, is when you make a new molecule. When you really sit back and think about it. This molecule may never, ever have occurred in creation. But how do you know it exists? I understand the science behind the instrumentation, but when you really come down to it, its faith, that you believe [it exists], whether it's a spectrometer, or whatever you are using does what it's supposed to do – what somebody created it to do. And to me, this is exactly what we do on a much bigger level when God created us. Whether or not we had experience in the church, God made us to find him. He made creation, so when you look at light and heat on a basic level, there's something in it that I think that God wanted us to discover, to bring him to an understanding of him.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Phil: We mentioned Darwin before and these other people around him, [Lyell, etc.] at the time. Well, they just basically took all of his stuff and said, “Well, let’s go with that idea.” Yeah, but you’re putting faith now in a person which basically is what secularism is. It’s some king, some ruler, some “expert” and so when it’s come way back to the idea of the Big Bang VS evolution, it’s like – what’s easier to believe? Is it an article of faith that all of this stuff started with no intelligence behind it? Your experience tells you as a scientist, you wouldn’t have order. You would have massive chaos. Something had to organize it all. Anything you run an experiment on that you cannot touch is faith. It’s faith – you’re believing something or something somebody else told you. But does that make more sense from the perspective or reason? Does it make more sense to believe what this person or that person had to say? Einstein did not actually believe in what his science was telling him had to be. Einstein did not actually believe what his science was telling him had to be. He was convinced that everything always was. But there had to be a beginning – which he had to admit. What’s interesting about Einstein is that there’s a story about him when he was young, in college. One of his professors was from an ethical standpoint was trying to disprove the existence of God – this idea that if there’s bad in the world, how could God exist? And so, Einstein said to the professor, “Does cold exist?” and the professor said, “Of course!” Einstein said, “No – all cold is, is the absence of heat!” He did the same thing with light. And so, he took the professor on regarding the evil and good. I guess the professor was belittling another student and Einstein just jumped in with this.

Phil: The thing is though, that’s kind of how I look at a lot of stuff – if you don’t have all the pieces. In the absence of a lot of pieces, you cannot see the picture and don’t pretend you could just start constructing something along the middle line and try to take people from there on. If you think what had to happen before it. When I was in the seminary, I said the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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humblest people are scientists because there are so many times you say, this is how it has to be – and you prove yourself wrong. But you have to have the humility to say I'm wrong and change your view. This is exactly what a lot of people don't do in the sciences. There's so much peer review but we're living in it. When you actually have your peers in your intellectual circle that aren't thinking out of that circle, you say I'll just disagree – this is great. But then you give it to somebody who's in a totally different discipline, the stuff is junk. The thing is, God is beyond all of this. But is he like smiling at it all? I don't know.

Phil: I know what happened when I was up at St Tikhon's. There's an adoration that's going on and people are venerating relics and people from outside see – it's like you get this kind of idol worship thing. They see that as idol worship. Somebody made a comment about it and I heard it. I said to the person, "Do you know what that person might have received from that?"

Phil: And you cannot study God. God cannot be studied. Theology is experience. I did a lot of work on chocolate. It's very interesting. The word for the cocoa plant actually comes out of the Greek. Most words are Latin. The cocoa plant is "Theobroma." That word translated means "food of God or God's food." I look at the compounds in chocolate which is theobromine. It's basically along the same line as caffeine. It's a stimulant. If you look at how it reacts with the body, it gives you a bigger energy spike. People with asthma attacks at times – chocolate will help that. The thing is, when you take this idea of Theobroma the word "Theo" comes from an action verb. That verb translates to burn, to see, to run. Look at what happens in that gospel reading in Luke in the last chapter. The two disciples do not recognize him. And he goes to eat with them. Their eyes were opened. They ran back, and their hearts were burned within. That is what theology is. It's not something to study...it's an

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

experience. Like the theology of relics – it's experiencing it. It's something that could be very unique to them. But it holds a much deeper meaning than anything you can read out of a book. I think it informs your reason. If you try to separate them, and some people can, then how do you accept within yourself that if you had a very positive experience, with something like relics – how do you separate that out? Does it cause conflict? It's hard to do something in a controlled experiment. Once you have something like a relic, it's not just pure faith. Reason has to start interacting somewhere there. If it wasn't for the relics, would you have had the same experience, the same results? So, the question I ask is because we are made the way we are, that we want to interact with our senses, in a sense to get the reason, the sights. Do we need to touch or see? Is that who we are at heart? When I say the heart, the heart's there very early. With the heart, is there a neurological meeting there? But I don't see the heart as the brain.

Phil paused and then continued: The heart regarding faith. There's something there, that has to draw you. If you try to put this all into a much bigger scheme of things, all of these things are just done as a means for God to draw us to him. So, if you have a friend that has cancer and relics and prayer bring what you desire is the result, is the whole thing because God is interacting with you to draw you to him? Relics aren't magic. In a reasoning sense, if you have a relic of Saint Basil, and somebody received a cure from that, then that's what they do, then everybody would believe. Those relics would be the same thing every time. Science would say you receive a cure every time. There we are just seeing them in the material sense. Is the relic the meeting place? In other words, is there like this holiness or sanctity or something in that relic? Then some people would say, then why do I need a relic if God is everywhere? I could be in the middle of a desert with no relics or no anything. That

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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is sanctified and God could help. If so, then why does he use these other instruments [relics]? It's to bring people to himself. Sometimes I think because we are at this age so we are so much more advanced, but there is no way to take care of this thing now [an ailment] the same means that worked 2000 years ago, will work today if you have faith. And that faith was the same back then as it is now. But it's harder I think now based on the world we live in. When you separate the two – faith and reason – when you allow reason to overpower, you find it a lot harder to allow faith to be there. So, you dismiss it. We basically live in a culture that just looks at faith as something that is in the church. You got our world, and you wanna do whatever you wanna do in your little church. But the world moves on without it. When you had political leaders, who had very good faith, and were actually leading people under them based upon that faith, they wouldn't do anything that was just based on secular whim. And I think now I don't ever see that finding it ways back unless [it changes].

Phil: When does a relic come into being? When you go back to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter was still alive. He was still present. Even his shadow. When you go back to Moses - the darkness – the unknowingness' of God in a sense. Again, I ask myself the purpose. For example, Saint Basil – he lived for a century. With Saint Basil's church, in which I was raised in, I find myself so much in tune with him when I read about him. A person who lived back so long ago. Is that what brings the connection? Or is that why I renovate the relics? It's something I first did without thought – I just did it. And I, not knowing, who Saint Basil really was. So, because of relics, is that the reason for the track I'm on? It's interesting because when I was at St Tikhon's, and this might have something to do with this, one of the professors was very western in terms of his philosophy. Saint Basil wrote on the six days of creation. But it was all Aristotelian science. So, I noticed with professors – this one in particular – there was this Aristotelian mindset. This is the mind of

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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the Fathers. I said, No! I said Saint Basil was educated in the Aristotelian science of his day. He used the science of his day to communicate his knowledge – a knowledge which did not come through any kind of philosophy. He used that though to express his theology, his understanding. So, the vocabulary, the logical arguments he used were Aristotelian, whereas in this day and age, if a person wants to do what Saint Basil did, they take on the science of this day to explain what we know. For example, quantum mechanics – in terms of what we know as science. He was trying to communicate. I find it very limiting to say Saint Basil was an Aristotelian thinker. I don't think he was at all. I think Saint Basil was a Christian. And that Christian mindset, in order to fulfill what he believed, was the way he could spread the gospel- taking the great expanse of knowledge he had (his education) he used that.

Phil: Don't limit. Because what you do when you do that, you're kind of limiting God to speaking in those terms. Because God can reach people in all cultures. So, is that we need to learn that bizarre philosophy today, just like Saint Basil learned the Aristotelian philosophy in order to express himself? And that's what I learn from my scientific perspective. It's interesting to learn science, but it's not the end for me. And I think for a lot of people, what happens in where you get the conflict, is science is an end. And so, when the science is an end, there's a conflict. When the science is seen as a progression, to help with the faith, there's no conflict. I'm fascinated with all the chemistry – the analysis of the Shroud, of the cross, etc. But in the end, does it matter?

The interview had to an end when the church was being closed and locked up for the day. The interview had taken two hours and we had both chosen to leave just as a thunderstorm was breaking out. On the drive home, Phil provided me with much to think about.

***Interview 8***

Eastern Orthodox Father Stephen Cassidy is a Fifty-year-old resident of Waymart, PA. He considers his ethnicity to be that of a mutt [his word choice]. He was raised in North Carolina and began attending church ever since his baptism. He is also a convert, having converted from the Episcopalian faith. He and his family were received into the Orthodox Church in July 2002. He was ordained in April, 2003. I had met Fr Cassidy at the rectory of St Tikhon's Orthodox church in Waymart, PA. The rectory is also part of the business office that is beautifully constructed. Here is his story.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Fr. Cassidy: Yes, many. I have the relic of Saint John Chrysostom at my house

Interviewer Note: [Saint John was an important Early Church Father who served as archbishop of Constantinople. He is best known for his preaching and public speaking abilities, as well as his denunciation of abuse of authority by the political and ecclesiastical leaders. His work, *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, is well known and for that reason, and is regarded as one of the most prolific authors in the early Christian Church. but shares fame as a prolific writer with both Augustine of Hippo and Origen of Alexandria.]

Fr. Cassidy: I have the relic of Saint Catherine of Alexandria at my house

Interviewer Note: [Saint Catharine was a Christian Saint who was martyred at eighteen years of age in the early 4th century during the reign of emperor Maxentius. According to biographies about her, she was a known scholar and a princess who converted hundreds of people to Christianity. She is reported as one of the Saints who appeared to Joan of Arc.]

Fr. Cassidy: I have the relic of Saint Nikolaj Velimirovic – I'll take you where he died, two doors down – like behind that couch [close to where I as the ethnographer was seated]. We have in the monastery church, the relics of fifteen to twenty Saints. The chapel

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

there, where there is a reliquary, has all of the Apostles. The whole place is a reliquary. There are lots of relics here at Saint Tikhon's.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Fr. Cassidy: In our house, we only ask the daily intercession of our Patron Saints. So, mine is Saint John Chrysostom, the 4<sup>th</sup> century arch bishop of Constantinople. My wife's is Saint Catherine of Alexandria – also an early martyr. Our sons are named for Saint Sebastian who was an early Roman martyr. Our son Zachary - his patron Saint is Saint Zachariah – the prophet from the Old Testament. Our daughter, Alennina – her patron saint is Nina of Georgia. She was a woman evangelist who converted the nation of Georgia – the Kingdom of Georgia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. And Our daughter in-law is named is named for Eve – as in Adam and Eve. And in regular prayers, we remember those particular Saints. And as I mentioned we have the relics of St Catherine and Saint John in our house and we venerate those relics almost every day.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Fr Cassidy: For us and our family, the intercessions of the Saints is new to us in Orthodoxy. Now we've been Orthodox Christians for fifteen or twenty years, having converted in the Summer of 2002. So that's nineteen years. But for the first thirty years of our lives, (this is something that I didn't really know about) so we are growing into that faith because it is something we are adopting from the outside, so to speak, because we weren't raised with it. More customarily I could say it's related to asking the intercessions of Mary for example. One Saint that has become particularly dear to our family is Saint Xenia of St Petersburg [c. 1719–1730 – c. 1803, who is a patron saint of St. Petersburg, After the

## Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles

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passing of her husband, she gave all her possessions to the poor.] who is known to help people to find jobs and we thank Saint Xenia for helping our daughter in-law to find a job recently. I often ask the intercession of Saint John Chrysostom. He's universally considered the greatest preacher that ever lived by everyone including the Baptists that knew he exists. So, it would be routine for me to ask his intercession for my teaching or my preaching.

Interviewer: Does that add strength to your belief?

Fr Cassidy: It certainly encourages me

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the Saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

Fr Cassidy: I could tell you one personal story and I could tell you a few anecdotes that are not my personal stories. My personal story is there is a miracle working and myrrh streaming icon called *Kardiotissa*, "The Tender Heart" which means related to the Mother of God, that is down in Taylor, PA. This icon has been streaming myrrh for a long time – like years. When I say streaming, I will share with you that I am not a skeptic of these things. But I am a Thomist – I have to see it to believe it. And until this experience, I never saw it before. November, a year ago, we had a meeting here of the missionary board I serve on. The board members came from around the nation. And one of them is a friend who was the pastor of this church in Taylor. And they asked – could he bring his icon? The abbot said that would be fine. It had visited here before.

Fr Cassidy: Often times, by the way, we will refer to those icons as if they were people. So, they might say, "she's" visited here before, not "it." It's a very personal kind of thing. So, this wonderful, miracle-working icon was brought out here and came into the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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church of the monastery church and was in a glass case about that size [points to an 11"x12" frame much like a shadow box.] And it had a big glass on a hinge. So, the glass is kind of to protect the icon from too much lip prints or something [indicating how pilgrims kiss the icon.] stuff like that. The glass – it was like its own ecosystem. There was so much myrrh in there that it was raining on itself. The glass was completely dripping on the inside and at the bottom, about right here [indicating where a cloth was located] was a big wad of cotton swabbing – wadding they might call it or batting. Anyway, it was a big stack of it down there. Completely, dripping, soaking wet like you could wring it out like a washcloth. And all of the myrrh is coming from that icon for years, and years, and years. The Priest went through the church and he put the icon like this [indicating a tipping motion] and it would just pour into your hands. And he went around and like poured it into the hands of many people that were there. Then after we served the service, he put the icon on the stand in the middle of the church where it's on an easel like a podium. And we served a beautiful service of Thanksgiving or intercession to the mother of God or something like that. And then he tore a big piece of that cotton and gave it to me for me to stand there and to anoint people when they would come up and kiss the icon. And then they would turn to me and I would anoint them on the forehead with the myrrh or their hands if they wanted. And I probably anointed a hundred or hundred and fifty people. And I'm telling you there was more myrrh in my hands when I finished than when I started. It's just myrrh, myrrh, myrrh, everywhere – myrrh. I did not experience a healing, although I wish I would have. I did not experience any particular sense of comfort or peace but more bewilderment like "whoa!" But what I did experience is this: The question came to me what am I supposed to do with my hands now, because when you come in contact with something that miraculous, if you wash them, you would be dirtying your hands. If you're hands are just completely drenched in this holy oil, if

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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you washed your hands with soap and water you're dirtying them, as nothing else would be more pure or holy [than the myrrh oil].

In the same way we celebrate on January 6<sup>th</sup> we celebrate the baptism of Jesus and in the Orthodox church, we bless a lot of water on that day. We bless big vats of water for people to drink holy water and we bless big bodies of water – lakes, ponds, rivers, oceans on that day as a way to sanctify the whole world. We ask ourselves what makes holy water, holy water? Is holy water super charged water? Like Pellegrino water, you have water that came straight out of the earth. It even came out of the earth bubbling that way. That water, by our measurements is pure water. So, is holy water supercharged pure water? Is it purer than that [pointing to the Pellegrino water] Or is holy water and everything else fallen water? And from the Orthodox perspective, is that everything else fallen water including the Pellegrino which is delicious right out of the ground? But it takes part in the fallen universe. And as a result, that water can be contaminated. And so, the blessing of water takes the water from the fallen world, and asks God to make it water that is essential in communion with him – sacred water. That happens in part on that day because when you and I are baptized, in part, the baptism is washing of the outside of the person. What you would call a holy bath. However, what's really happening is the cleansing of the soul. So, there's an external part to the baptism and an internal, unseen part. When Jesus was baptized, he didn't have any need for that cleansing, especially on the soul because he was perfect as God. So, what happened was when he touched the water, the water didn't cleanse him, he cleansed the water. So that's our perspective on holy water, what holy water does, and where it comes from.

Fr Cassidy: If that carries over into things like this oil, this oil is coming from an unexplainable place or source. There's no little tube in the back that's pumping through. No

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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one has put a little container inside and when it gets to certain temperature, it pops out. It's a miracle from God. But to have contact with that kind of sanctity that's holy oil, think to yourself, I can't touch anything else right now. You don't want to turn the volume up on your TV because that would be taking part in hearing something you shouldn't be hearing. So that's the experience I had having that kind of contact with something as sacred as oil that is literally gushing out - sometimes it's called myrrh gushing. It's just uncontainable. And you have a sense of your own bit of smallness on one hand, and on the other hand you have an experience of this rich grace of God who's giving us this amazing gift for some reason and you don't know what it is. Now the oil from that icon has healed lots and lots of people and they come from all over the place. I had a little cotton ball-sized piece of that I keep in in Ziploc bag in my pocket and I went to Scranton airport to fly out some place and I also had the icon of Saint Anna with me which I hope I'll be able to show you.

Interviewer: We walked across from the Seminary main administrative building to the reliquary and Father Cassidy continued with stories.

Fr Cassidy: So, someone saw me carrying this icon - he said, "Oh, I've been to Taylor, Pa and I know someone who was cured of a major heart problem by the oil of that icon." So those stories abound. Here's one...Saint Anna was the Mother of Mary [Figure 20]. As you may not or may know, Mary's mother was barren – she could not conceive. And it was by a miracle of God that she was able to conceive Mary whom she then entrusted the care of the temple and that's where Mary grew up as a little child before the Arch Angel Gabriel came and told her the good news that she would bear Jesus – the Annunciation. So, this icon of Saint Anna has many miracles attributed to it – to her you could say. You'll see boat loads of necklaces and rings that are draped on the icon. Those are like thank you

## Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles

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presents from people that were healed, etc. But because Saint Anna was cured from bareness, often, asking for her intercessions frees barren women from being barren. So, here's one example [Fr Cassidy pulled out a thank you note from a woman that included a photo of a baby.] Father Surges gave this to me the other day. It reads:

*"I'm writing to simply say thank you when you visited at George's in Charleston, WV with the icon of Saint Anna in February 2019. After 15 years of marriage, and three failed pregnancies, my husband and I had all but given up. We quietly tried to accept the idea that we would likely to never have children. But we both carried the burden with heavy hearts. We're new to the Orthodox Church and only been a part of St George for a few years. I learned so much but still have much room to grow. I recall how nervous I was and you approached with the icon and how scared I felt to pray for such blessings. However, a few short months after your visit we got the surprise of our lives. And in March 2020, Anna was born."*

So. Saint Anna came in February and then 1 year later, this little baby was born who's named Anna.

Interviewer's Note: [As Fr Cassidy came to end of the note, we entered into the chapel and I immediately sensed the scent of an incredible sweet-smelling substance.]

Fr Cassidy: This is a monastery Chapel dedicated to Saint Theodosius - an 11<sup>th</sup> century saint. Here's Saint Anna. Her chains are not here right now. I want you to put your nose in here for a second [He pointed to the icon and I took in a deep breath as he instructed.]. Can you smell that beautiful fragrance? [I had confirmed the aroma]. So, this is the residual fragrance of myrrh that was streaming from this icon about a decade ago. So sometimes they have services asking Saint Anna's prayers in the church on Sundays. That's a relic of Saint Anna right there [pointing to the small object incased in a round inset reliquary covered with glass]. And sometimes we have the blessing to take Saint Anna on the road and accompany her to wherever we're going. So basically, I took Saint Anna to California where my wife and I went to the San Diego area for a number of services there. So

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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customarily, Saint Anna has a whole bunch of chains with her so she must have gone on a little trip so that's the only reason why her chains wouldn't be there.

Fr Cassidy then began naming all of the relics and whom they are associated with:

Fr Cassidy: Here we have the relics of seven American Saints [Figure 21]; St Tikhon who was the patron of Moscow – in the early 1900's he died in house arrest by the communists. His bones are here. St Herman of Alaska: he was a missionary to Alaska in 1794. His bones are here. Here we have Saint John Maxamovitch [ a diocesan bishop who served from China to France, and to the United States]. Here's Saint Alexis Toth [a Russian Orthodox church leader in the Midwestern US who, became responsible for the conversions of approximately 20,000 Eastern Rite Catholics to the Russian Orthodox Church. He was canonized by the Orthodox Church in 1994.] Saint Toth was a man who served here in Wilkes Barre, PA actually, and founded many churches and his whole body is lying in state in the church although it's under a full-sized body icon - but on his Feast Day in May, often times they bring the coffin out and open it up. We serve the services there so his relics are here.

Here we have Saint Tikhon Zadonsk who was a spiritual writer and Russian Orthodox bishop. He was a Russian Saint of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Here's Saint Raphael of Brooklyn: [He was the first Orthodox Christian bishop consecrated on American soil.] He lived and served in Brooklyn, NY. He also served here at the Monastery church. His relics are here.

Saint Velimirovic. He was born and raised in Serbia. He was in a Nazi concentration camp for some time. And, he finished his life here at Saint Tikhon's Seminary He was our rector here in 1955. So, his bones are there. So, there you have seven of the Saints.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Over here [moving across this sacred space] is Saint Cyprian the martyr; Saint Justinian from the fifth century, Saint Bridgett; Saint Patrick; Saint Tryphon; Saint Gregory; Saint Augustine; Saint Monica; Saint Blaise; Saint Ignatius of Antioch; Saint Athanasius; Athanasius Saint Edward the King; and Saint Wenceslaus.

Interviewer Note: While Fr Cassidy pointed to all of the Saints, I was inspired to find out a little history about each one. For example, Saint Cyprian the martyr lived between 210 – 258 AD, having been born in North Africa [Figure 22]. He was a bishop of Carthage, an early Christian writer, and is also recognized in the Roman Catholic church. Following his conversion to Christianity, he proved to have strong pastoral skills during the outbreak of the Plague of Cyprian. He is considered the pre-eminent Latin writer of Western Christianity, that is until the time of Augustine and Jerome; Saint Justinian was also known as Justinian the Great, was the Byzantine emperor from 527 to 565; Saint Bridgette was considered to be a mystic, and founder of the Bridgettines nuns following the death of her husband. She is one of the six patron saints of Europe, together with Benedict of Nursia; Saint Patrick was a missionary and bishop in Ireland during the fifth century. He is referred to as the "Apostle of Ireland" and is their primary patron Saint. He is venerated as a Saint in the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican Communion, and Lutheran Churches. He is a significant because he is regarded the "Enlightener of Ireland and most importantly, is considered as equal-to-the-Apostles.

Interviewer Note: Saint Tryphon was a third-century Saint, martyr, and holy unmercenary and is venerated by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches; Saint Gregory is also known as Gregory the Great, and he was the bishop of Rome in 590 AD. He is known for starting the first large-scale mission from Rome to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons in England to Christianity; Saint Augustine was a theologian, philosopher, and North

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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African Bishop whose writings heavily influenced Western philosophy; Saint Monica was a Saint and the mother of St. Augustine. She is honored in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches for her virtues; Saint Blaise was a physician and bishop for Armenia and is venerated in the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox churches. Interestingly, he is the patron saint of wool combers and for throat disease. He was martyred by being attacked with iron combs, and eventually beheaded; Saint Ignatius of Antioch was an early Christian bishop. Prior to his martyring in Rome, he wrote a series early Christian theology. Together with Clement of Rome and Polycarp he is considered as one of the three most important figures in Christian history.

Fr Cassidy: Saint Athanasius was also called Athanasius the Confessor. He was a theologian, and the chief defender of Trinitarianism which placed him against Arianism; Saint Edward was an English King from 975 until his murder in 978; Saint Wenceslaus was the duke of Bohemia from 921 until his assassination in 935 He became the patron saint of the Czech state. He is the subject of the well-known "Good King Wenceslas", a carol for Saint Stephen's Day, but is now sang as a Christmas carol.

Fr Cassidy: So, this reliquary is always here.

[We walked back to the main office and continued our conversation. Stopping at the main church, the doors were locked.]

Fr Cassidy: We'll have to stop by again at a later time. There's a room in there with three walls of reliquaries. Then on the far side, is a big shrine of Saint Alexius which is basically, picture a big coffin but the coffin is actually inside a big oak box and on top of that oak box is a full person size painted icon of Saint Alexius with his bones there. [Saint Alexius is a fourth-century monk who lived in secrecy and is known for his dedication to

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Christ.] Then it has four carved pillars with a little roof and an oil lamp that hangs down over it. I have about 15 min before I have to have another meeting.

Interviewer: It looks like the church is growing as far as the research I've been doing.

Fr. Cassidy: I think what's happening is there's a shakeup in the world and that shakeup has many facets. But one of the many facets is adults raising difficult questions that a childlike Sunday school can't address for many reasons. Or, the Sunday school answer is sufficient for a child, but is not sufficient for an adult. We need to have a child-like faith our Lord tells us. It's true. But, a lot of the pious, basic pious teachings we received as children, we need to understand the nuance behind them as we get older. And when we ask those questions, we don't often find satisfactory answers in our own confession that we grew up in.

Fr Cassidy: In my case that was in the Episcopal church. My wife was raised Roman Catholic which she followed me to the Episcopal church. Then we as a whole family became Orthodox Christians. So, when you ask those questions, in our case we were asking the question - let's say about holy communion. In the Episcopal church, there were a variety of views as to what happens to that bread and wine and what to do with it if you have left overs. I don't mean to speak so plainly - to be so crass. If you have prepared communion for more people than is necessary on that particular day, the way you deal with what's left tells you what you believe about that. If you fed it to the ducks for example, or if you put it out at coffee hour for example. Or if you consumed it with some level of piety or if you guard it in a special place. Each of those actions tells something about what you believe about that. And if one has to ask the question, if one person puts it in a plastic storage container and inside a filing cabinet, and another person puts it inside of a beautiful carved tabernacle with a vigil lamp hanging over in front of it, and both of those are in the same confession, how can it be

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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both of those things? It's either worth the dignity of a special resting place because of what it is. Or, it's not, in which case you could equally feed it to the ducks. But it can't be both of those things. It can't be one of those things in church A in town A, and one of those things in church B in town B, and those churches calling themselves the same thing – Episcopalian for example. But I ask the question, is it this or that? And if it's not that, then how does this one stay in communion with that one? And what is communion and surely Christians must have had some kind of common thought about this from the beginning. So, you start reading church history.

Fr Cassidy: The same thing one might ask about say the icons or miraculously healings from relics and things like that. I found in my particular church of my upbringing, there was a definitive statement against relics that says that in the 39 Articles of religion of the Anglican confession, it says, that relics are repugnant to the faith. But what about the shadow of the Apostles? What about the handkerchief in the Book of Acts? What about this icon in Taylor, Pennsylvania? What are you going to do with that? Are you gonna say that's from the Devil? And if your gonna say that's from the Devil, then we have to really make a choice. Is that from the Devil, that's healing all these people and has this beautiful and amazing heavenly fragrance? If that's from the devil, then we need to completely cast away Orthodox Christianity. If it's not from the Devil, but it's from heaven, then the people really against it are totally wrong. And if they're totally wrong, then we shouldn't have anything to do with their religion.

So, I think that the shakeup in faith across the whole world today - but certainly among Americans - we have a particular kind of religion in our bones as American people that's mostly an independent idea that "nobody can tell me what I can believe or not

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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believe.” But when we ask those hard questions, we look seriously into those things, at the end of the day you can only come up with two conclusions. You can either come up with Roman Catholic or Orthodox. They’re the only two churches that go back to the very beginning. And then one just has to wrestle with the question, which one got it right? The Presbyterians were not founded in the New Testament. They were founded in Geneva in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. So, when people raise those kinds of questions, or when they encounter something sacred, that’s totally outside the boundaries of what their particular faith tradition has defined, you have to ask the question, what category do I put this in?

Fr Cassidy: One thing I talked about on the phone a week or two ago was Father Ephraim -the abbot of a very well-known and very ancient monastery which is on a mountain republic in Greece [The Republic includes 20 monasteries which houses around 2,000 Eastern Orthodox Greek, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian monks] on a peninsula where the monasteries have been for about 1,000 years. And he was hospitalized with Covid since May and incubated for weeks and weeks and weeks and they took out his tube. And he is recovering, communicating, and so forth thank the Lord. But when he went to the hospital, he was allowed one 5-minute visit from some other monks from the monastery. He was in critical, dying condition. He was well guarded in ICU. So, what did they do? They brought the relics of the Saints and they blessed him with the bones of the saints, among other things and services they may have served at that time. Perhaps they gave him communion, I’m not sure. I suspect so. But I do know because I talked to my friend Nikos who is like the right-hand man of the abbot there who said, they let the monks in and they blessed him with the relics of the Saints.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Fr Cassidy: So, it's that kind of importance in the lives of Orthodox Christians I expressed to you earlier. I'm among the inside now, so to speak, but these practices, are not a part of me from the inside because I grew up for 30 years without them and in some cases, against them. So, I'm still only learning even though I'm in my nineteenth year as an Orthodox Christian, how to appreciate, employ, call on, take part in, in respect to the Saints, their intercessions, their relics - whether it is the relics of their bones, relics of their clothing. We have Saint Nickolai's vestments; we have his desk. What do you do with a Saint's desk? One just might actually write on it. You may place a sign saying Saint Nicolai worked at this desk. We will probably do something a little more hand's off than that. But those things are very important to us also. I don't think we as Orthodox Christians have the classifications quite like they do in the Roman Catholic like first class, second class, and third class. Although I heard those kinds of statements. And on the peninsula of Mount Athos they have the skull of saint John Chrysostom encased in silver and just a small part of the scalp. We have things that were of the Saints.

[A discussion ensued regarding 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> class types of relics which is a type of nomenclature the Roman Catholic church uses to determine the class of the relic.]

Fr Cassidy: When even now on eBay for example, you buy the reliquary and they give you the relic. That way, they get around the sale of human parts, etc. But what's curious and I don't know the whole history of it but at some point, after Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church was unloading boatloads of relics. Even the relic of St John Chrysostom was obtained by an Orthodox priest friend of mine that gotten it from a Roman Catholic priest who didn't want it anymore or in exchange for a cross, or an icon.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer Note; It is interesting to note that although St Tikhon's Monastery has a church located on beautiful grounds, they have no formal way to track those (who typically are called parishioners) who attend church. As the grounds belong to the monastery, no one particular priest is assigned as the main pastor. Those people who do attend church at St Tikhon's come and go; so, no official clubs or societies are to be found that often serve other churches to organize church sponsored events, socials and outings, etc.

Fr Cassidy: The meeting I was finishing when I came over here late, we were having a debate about what happens up there on a Sunday [pointing to the church on the hill]? What I mean by that is a parish is easily defined. You got a church and a town, a pastor and people. A monastery church is not a parish. It's a monastery. And the services are monastery services and the abbot is in charge. But what do you do? Let's say you came this Sunday. Let's say you visited this Sunday, and only this Sunday. You have a special name in the world and that's called a pilgrim. You showed up on a little pilgrimage to a monastery, you came to the church services but presumably you have a parish some place. And so, pilgrims – easily accounted for. They drop in for a Sunday or two and they go back to their parish. What about people who retire around a monastery, or live around a monastery but don't want to go to the parish church but instead they go on Sundays? Well, they're not parishioners exactly because it's a monastery and a monastery is not a parish and doesn't have parishioners. A monastery has monks, and visitors.

Interviewer: You may have an honorary membership listing.

Fr. Cassidy: Well, that's the complicated part. So, what's the purpose of that? Do they vote on things? Is it only on Sunday mornings? Who's in charge? Who's in charge on Sundays if one of those people get sick? Who's responsible as the pastor? All of those are

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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really important questions. And so, the monastery has that kind of vague existence with the people in it and we're only getting started on whether or not what to do with the people who gather there and who are more or less permanent. Sometimes the widow of a priest who served here at the seminary that lives by and she goes there, she never will go any other place because that's where she went her whole life. But, there's not a parish council - all those things. That's a long way around to say I don't have any particular contact like that that I could share with you. But you could call Father John Kowalczyk at the church (St Michael's) in Jermyn, PA. He has parishioners. He may have parishioners you could talk to. Or, Father Innocent. He's the pastor at Holy Trinity church in Wilkes Barre.

Interviewer Note: Following the interview with Father Cassidy, I had decided on the twenty-minute drive back home to make contact with the clergy from where the Kardiotissa, the myrrh stream icon, is located – in Taylor, PA. After leaving two voice mails over the weeks, I made the choice to attend the Moleben, a prayer service of intercession, to honor the Mother of God on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. But I wanted to check out the church first with my wife and if the opportunity arose, meet the clergy and arrange a private appointment to speak with them about the Kardiotissa.

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, we drove 45 minutes west of Honesdale and pulled into the parking lot of St George's Church in Taylor, PA – arriving just as the parishioners were getting settled into the pews. While entering the beautiful church through the Narthex (also called “courtyard”) from the west, and into the Nave (also called the Holy of the Tabernacle), very little movement was occurring in the East where the Sanctuary is located. But all around the church could be found beautiful displays – large murals with painted scenes from the life of Christ mixed in with eastern styled full-length representations of Saints. Byzantium style

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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images – icons - were also displayed, especially on small easels where the parishioners could get up close to and see the teaching of the liturgy. Father George Papadeas, describes this spiritual moment best in his book *Why did She Cry, The Story of the Weeping Madonna*:

On the walls of the Nave and narthex we see Icons and Murals with portrayals of the Nativity, the baptism of our Lord, The Holy Transfiguration, the Resurrection, the Pentecost, etc., all of which provide a visual presentation of theological teachings of the Church. The many Icons in the orthodox Church provide a warm and encompassing feeling for the worshipper. They serve to envelope a person into a religious sphere and frame of mind. Icons are an aid, which can help to bring about an elevation above the mundane, by participating in prayer during the Divine Liturgies and other Church Services (Papadeas, 2000: 18).

Many of these images, as I looked towards the front of the Nave, were illuminated with a soft dancing light from hundreds of prayer candles that were left burning in a bank of candle support stands. These were placed here by the parishioners wishing to seek the intercessions of the Saints. At some of the stations, the faithful were kneeling before the icons and candle stands. The flickering glow of these candles can create a very comforting emotion – one of peace and one of calming realization that one is no longer in the rush of every-day life and away from the profane – the billboards and heavy traffic on the roads. It was a definite different feeling – that of having entered a real sacred space. But what also added to this realization was the fragrant aroma in the air wherever one stood – that of roses and the slight detection of incense which was more over powered by the scent of roses.

We had stayed for the service till the end. The service itself was extraordinary and sung in its entirety by both clergy members and parishioners. It was not until we stood in line at the end of the Moleben service to see the myrrh streaming icon, that I had discovered that the sweet aroma had been originating from the icon in the glass case – which I had determined at that moment, had overpowered the smell of burning frankincense. The closer I

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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drew to the icon, the stronger the aroma of roses. After being anointed with the holy myrrh oil that the priest had touched to my forehead, I then made the attempt while walking back to the pew to speak with one of the deacons. Success! I caught his attention and asked him for a private interview. “If you can come back on Sunday following the divine liturgy, I can try to speak with you then” was his response. And so, I marked my calendar for Sunday, August 1<sup>st</sup>.

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, I made the second trip back to Taylor, PA. This time, the usual Divine Liturgy seemed to take almost two hours long on this particular day at St George’s. And to my disappointment, while waiting for the service to end, I observed two large commercial buses pull into the parking lot of St George’s church. I was thinking, “this is over – I’m never going to get a chance today to speak with the clergy.” No sooner had I finished the thought, the liturgy ended and parishioners began exiting the church and pilgrims from the buses that arrived from New Jersey began pouring into the pews. So, I moved up to the front pew hoping to catch the attention of the Deacon I had chatted briefly with the previous Wednesday before. He kept moving in and out of the sacristy, putting things away, snuffing candles, and tidying up. “There he goes!” I thought! “Dang...missed him again! “Hey, there he goes again...but I didn’t catch his eye!” Over and over this went. Finally, after I began to rethink a strategy to meet with the clergy, and thought perhaps I can leave him a telephone number to call me at so I can meet with him when he isn’t occupied, he tapped me on the shoulder as I reached for notepaper and pen in my briefcase. “Darrell, c’mon we can meet now with Father...follow me!” So, inside the sacristy I followed the Sub Deacon and was introduced to the celebrant that presided over the Divine Liturgy just minutes before. What follows in what I learned from that interview.

***Interview 9***

Father Michael Lawrence is a 50-year-old Eastern Orthodox raised in Warren County, PA, close to Erie, PA. Now living at the rectory next to Saint George's church, he entered the seminary soon after his graduation from high school.

Interviewer: Thanks for meeting with me Fr Lawrence. In addition to the famous Icon, you also have relics here at the church, do you not? Fr Lawrence then brought over a wooden box - the size of a box that would hold one's collection of highly cherished silver. But this box also contained a window, much like a shadow box -which revealed relics [Figure 23]. Fr. Lawrence pointed out and spoke of each one and it was difficult at times to hear him speak as he was in direct competition to the singing that was taking place in the church just fifteen to twenty some feet away. Apparently other clergy members were providing a special Moleben for the pilgrims, that were straining their necks in the pews to get a peek at the myrrh streaming icon located front and center of the altar.

Fr Lawrence: So we have the nails from the great martyr Saint George [a Christian Roman soldier that was sentenced to death for refusing to recant his Christian beliefs], Saint Nicholas of Serbia, Saint Pantaleon [a martyr of Nicomedia during the Diocletian Persecution of 305 AD where three to five thousand Christians were executed]; Saint Ignatius Antioch; Saint Theodosius [a monk, abbot, Saint, and the founder of the monastic way of life]; Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco, Saint Mary Magdalen; and Saint John Chrysostom [An Early church priest who served as archbishop of Constantinople and was known for his denunciation of abuse by authority]; And these are various others, relics of martyrs from Mount Athos - they are embedded in the cross. A large bone from Saint Jacob [entitled as the "Moses of Mesopotamia" and was present at the first ecumenical

council at Nicaea. Several more relics were in the case which Father Lawrence could not identify.]

Interviewer: When did the Kardiotissa icon begin streaming myrrh?

Fr. Lawrence: October 13, 2011. It was a Thursday.

Interviewer Note: Coincidentally on the same day, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.1 struck the Indonesian island of Bali causing damage to some buildings and injuring fifty people.

Interviewer: So, the icon was painted by a local artist?

Fr. Lawrence: It's a print [Figure 24]. Some of the decorative work around the icon is hand done but the icon itself is a print of the Kardiotissa icon done by the Abbots of Holy Protection Monastery in Whitehaven. This one is the copy.

Interviewer: Is it faith that is making this phenomenon to occur?

Fr Lawrence: The way the account goes is, we were visited by the Iveron icon [the All Holy Theotokos] from Hawaii. And she (the Icon) was here in the church the day before – Wednesday October 12, 2011. That night, while she was here, the keeper of the Iveron icon gave us a copy of that icon and touched the two together. And then the next day, that icon was misting, and fragrant. So, I brought over the icon that I have and put it out for veneration just because the following day, Thursday, October 13, which on the old calendar is the Eve of the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God. And the Kardiotissa icon was made at Holy Protection Monastery the next day. So, there's a connection with this thing. And when I brought the icon over, I took some myrrh from the little one and anointed the Kardiotissa. By the end of the day, both icons were misty, both icons were fragrant, and it was the following day, during the liturgy, that it started actually streaming. And the small one – the copy of the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Iveron icon – streamed for about a year and it stopped. And this one here [at St George’s Church] will be streaming for ten years this October.

Interviewer: One wonder’s why it sopped?

Fr. Lawrence: There’s various speculation about that. I have no idea. It’s all a guess. God does what he does...I have no idea. It’s a mystery to me. But she has slowed down this year – slowed down a lot! So, what would take a day to accumulate now takes a week. What took a week, now takes a month. That’s why we don’t have a lot to give out because we used to give it out constantly.

Interviewer: Yes, Father Cassidy of St Tikhon’s told me that when it was streaming, he could ring it out.

Fr. Lawrence: Yes, it’s still streaming – just not at the level as before.

Interviewer: So, being exposed to all this, what is the process of converting from say Roman Catholic to Eastern Orthodox?

Fr. Lawrence: There would be some things involved – just making sure one understood the differences, but primarily, doctrine.

Interviewer: Would one have to denounce some things?

Fr. Lawrence: You would be Chrismated, [in the Eastern Orthodox church, this is the gift of the Holy Spirit where the priest anoints all parts of a person’s body with the special oil called holy chrism. The oil is called myrrh. It is used to show that the gift of the Spirit was originally given to men through the apostles of Christ. This can also be seen in Acts 19.1–7.] But it depends – sometimes they just accept profession of faith. And there is renunciation of the Catholic faith in areas where they differ which includes things like infallibility of the Pope, and immaculate conception. The big thing with the Holy day of Immaculate

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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conception – it says that Mary was born with without sin – which we disagree with – because Jesus received a fallen humanity. He didn't receive a renewed humanity – he received fallen nature. And he could only get that from a person that had fallen nature, which was Mary. She was not immaculate. She was pure and Holy, which is why she was chosen, but she was not without sin. Saint Ignatious of Antioch says That fallen human nature was not redeemed and renewed. So, it couldn't have been an immaculate conception. So, that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Had you experienced any other phenomena occurring thought to be associated with the icon or relics?

Fr Lawrence: There are some amazing things that happened over the course of time – just mind boggling. We even had a man die here in the church. He had a massive heart attack during one of our Wednesday services. And I took the icon back and it dripped on him. The nurses were doing compression on him – CPR. There was no respiration, no heartbeat – nothing! When the myrrh hit his chest, he made a whoosh sound. He took a deep breath, opened his eyes and started singing, “Oh Mary, Mother of God, pray for us! Mary Mother of God, pray for us!” It was wild! He's since passed – not from a heart attack – he lived for another five years. When they got him to the hospital [during the heart attack at the church], they could not find anything wrong with him or what caused the heart attack.

Fr Lawrence: I always liked this one. This was a woman who had an inoperable brain tumor. There was nothing they could do because of the location, the size, all of that. She was just waiting to go. And a friend of her had come here. And I gave out some myrrh. She grabbed an icon card, took it back to her. And she was a woman of some faith, but not some extreme religious person. For lack of options, she decided to sleep (she anointed herself every night with the myrrh), went to bed, and slept with the myrrh and icon card under her

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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pillow. And one morning she woke up and just to find a mass of this stuff on her pillow. So, it scared her to death. So, she jumped up, grabbed her pillow, got herself together and she said she felt fantastic! She went to the hospital and the first thing they did was analyze the stuff on the pillow. That was the tumor! It had come out her nose during the night.

Fr Lawrence: There was another one and this one I like a lot because we have a lot of experiences with couples who are unable to have children – coming a lot to see the icon. And with this particular one – they were from Ohio and they’ve been trying to have a baby for ten, twelve years. “Nothing.” the doctors said, for various reasons and they [the couple] never gave up hope. Also, they came out, made the trip from Ohio to here for one of our Wednesday night services. We didn’t have a lot of myrrh because we came off of a big trip from a big church and gave everything away. And so, it takes time for it to accumulate so we didn’t have a lot. So, the sub-Deacon’s brother, gave her a little tiny piece [the myrrh-soaked cotton] and she took it and ate it! I never saw that before. So anyway, a couple of weeks later, I get an email – she’s pregnant! She carries the baby to term without issue – goes through delivery smooth – everything’s good! The baby is born – a little boy - and the doctor’s watching, the nurses are watching after the baby to make sure the hands are moving, the feet are moving and functioning as it should. And, they notice that the little guy’s fists were clenched and he wasn’t moving his fingers. And being a little concerned, they watched. Finally, the left hand opened up, the fingers move but not the right one. So, they gently pried his fingers open and sure enough, there’s a piece of cotton in the little guy’s hand!

Fr Lawrence: This is another one. This was a woman who was unable to have children – was pregnant four times and each time she lost the baby for the same reason.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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That's because of the connection during the early stages of development, there's a fusion of the brain stem and spinal cord. And if that fails, the baby is unviable. In the previous four pregnancies, that's exactly what happened – four times and the doctors thought it was something genetic and she would never be able to carry a baby to term. So, lo and behold, she's pregnant now for the fifth time! And this time, her father had come to our Wednesday night service. He gets some of the myrrh. So, she's now ready to go for her first ultrasound check up and just check on the baby in general, but more specifically, to check on that fusion. And so, before she goes, he anoints herself, anoints her belly. They do the ultrasound and they were baffled – amazed by what they saw! I even have a copy of the ultrasound.

Fr Lawrence then reached into a briefcase and pulled out the copy of the black and white ultrasound.

Fr Lawrence: This is the little baby. You can see the feet here, the little belly, the face, nose, head. There's one thing in this ultrasound image that is very unusual. From what I gather and you may know, from an ultrasound, there is no other light source – because you're in a dark room and so forth. So, one of the first things that the person who read the ultrasound noticed is this – coming from outside from the uterine wall – light! Where is that coming from and why is it there? They were baffled. Not only that, but it's going to the exact spot where that fusion takes place. So, this image was then sent to an imaging expert who teaches medical imaging at Texas A&M University. And when the professor saw the image, she started crying. She said, “Never in my life have I seen an ultrasound image like this!” She said, “In my opinion, this is God revealing himself in the language of science, because this is impossible! I like to think of this as the finger of the mother of God touching one of her little ones and making him whole.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Father Lawrence continued: And that's from a scientist! Even doctors have told me that the Kardiotissa icon has brought the medical community to their knees! There's so many – multitudes of stories like this and I have a lot of documentation where people have written stories out, describing what their experiences have been – not just physical healings but emotional, spiritual healings and conversion – that kind of stuff.

Father Lawrence: Another Deacon had told a story of how he and his wife were out on the road. His wife was driving when a HUMV had ran a stop sign and headed straight in their direction. They had at the time a piece of the cotton batting that had been infused with the myrrh streaming in the back of their car. In what appeared to be a “fluid-like motion - much like a cartoon” as the Deacon described it, the HUMV vehicle avoided them and appeared to bend around their own vehicle, fluidly, thus avoiding an auto accident and possible disaster for all involved. So, was this divine intervention that can be correlated to the myrrh streaming icon?

Interviewer Note: Father Lawrence agreed that the Kardiotissa is very good at protecting people. He went on to talk a bit more about the icon.

Father Lawrence: When all of this started and I was a bit younger, I didn't have all these issues with my back and foot. I used to ride quads. And we would go into the wood and sometimes we would ride and do stupid things. And there were a number of times when one of us should have gotten hurt. But even out in the middle of nowhere, we would be doing stupid things and we could still smell the icon. She was there – keeping watch.

Interviewer: Have you held other religious identities in the past?

Fr Lawrence: Byzantine Catholic – that's where I was baptized and grew up as Byzantine Catholic and converted when I was in college. The differences between the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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particular diocese of the Orthodox Church and Byzantine Catholic Church I came out of are extremely similar. I came from the same geographical region in eastern Europe, the language is the same, the music, the hymns of the liturgy are the same.

Interviewer: So that was separate from the Roman Catholic church?

Fr Lawrence: Yes, they serve an Eastern rite liturgy but they still observe the doctrinal of the Catholic church, so they would still celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Interviewer Note: I enquired about the incenses they used during the Liturgy and they do burn an incense with a slightly similar emitted by the icon, although the aroma of the icon to my senses that I observed is strikingly similar to that of rose water. The sub deacon had confirmed the title of the incense is called “rose violet” which still is slightly different from the aroma of the streaming myrrh from the icon.

Interviewer: Have you witnessed any other phenomena that was thought to be related to the icon or other relics?

Fr Lawrence: We bring everything to the Mother. She helps with all crisis. We get people coming from all over the world to visit the site and ask for her intercession. We had a nun from the Holy Land - she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She stayed in the church for three days – stayed here and prayed with the icon constantly. Went back to the Holy Land and I found out about a year and six months later – no cancer. It was gone. So, we’ve seen it so many times, it’s amazing. But I don’t know who it determines who gets healed and who doesn’t. How come I have to get this problem with my foot? And my own son, I prayed for him – he was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at three years old so he’s on an insulin pump and all that business. So why does he have to have this? I have no idea why this one is cured,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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and that one isn't. Some are converted. Sometimes it's people who come simply out of curiosity- no faith – pagans and they're cured. I even had a couple of scientists come once – to debunk the thing. They couldn't – and they were so arrogant – I mean rude! I was cooking in the kitchen, and I didn't expect them. I was in the kitchen making something for a festival. And I just let them in the church and let the icon out for them. They were very arrogant and I left them to do whatever they needed to do. I left them for about a half hour or 40 minutes. I came back in and here's both of them – and they're research doctors with PhD's and both of them on their knees in front of the icon crying. And they apologized. They said, "we didn't realize what we were going to find." So that was pretty amazing. They came with one purpose and left with a change of mindset.

Interviewer Note: I mentioned to Father Lawrence how a similar incident occurred to a secular Jewish scientist that was investigating the Shroud of Turin and as a result of his investigation, chose to convert to Catholicism.

Fr Lawrence: The Orthodox church believes in and accepts the shroud as the actual burial shroud of Jesus. And yes, [a man named] Sam – he was a Muslim and came and encountered the icon. He had heart problems. He stood up at a special session and said this icon is a disgrace and all that. And then he stood in front of her and he lost complete track of time. He stood there oblivious to people around him. He described it suddenly as if the heavenly mother reached out and grabbed his heart and in those brief moments of his encounter, he said she healed his physical heart and spiritual heart. Both were healed. He converted – he became Orthodox. He went back to his cardiologist and his heart was fine.

Interviewer Note: The interview came to an end as the moleben came to a close with the pilgrims stirring around the church. Fr Lawrence and the Sub Deacon then began to

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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prepare for the next service. In answer to my request, they had provided me with a sample of the cotton batting with a small amount of myrrh oil – a cotton ball sized sample containing a drop of oil perhaps the size of a pea. I was delighted and grateful. Traveling back to Honesdale provided much to think about and the aroma from the sample of the oil-soaked cotton, kept safely tucked away in a Ziplock bag (inside of my briefcase) was very prevalent and abundant the entire ride home.

Interviewer Note: Driving the back roads to home, recounting the stories from memory, and knowing I had in my possession a sample of holy oil - something that cannot be explained with science, is a feeling that puts one on an emotional roller coaster. This is because there are feelings of both intense joy and a calming peace. Yet, a crisis forms in the scientific mind and conflicts with the objectivity that I employ to scientifically observe and weigh any phenomena. As these thoughts were running through my mind, I had arrived home, parked the car in the garage and headed to my artifact conservation laboratory to unpack my briefcase. Here I pulled out the participant survey, the verbal consent form, clipboard, and notebook. Looking into the darkened briefcase, I spied the cotton sample that was handed to me by the sub deacon just an hour ago. I pulled out the cotton sample containing the myrrh oil and I was admittedly puzzled by the sight. The amount oil on the cotton batting I received had multiplied and doubled in volume since I departed the church! In my lab, I tried to replicate the phenomenon by mixing myrrh powder with olive oil and rose water. A drop of this mixture I added to a cotton ball. I waited an hour, believing that perhaps the oil had appeared to double in volume by the phenomenon known as “wicking.” But how wrong I was! The oil had not grown in size like the sample I was given taken from the Kardiotissa. In fact, my experimental oil I applied to the cotton appeared to be evaporating away, and faded in color. My scientific mind was puzzled – perhaps

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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disappointed to some degree. My spiritual side was, however, elated! So, here was the sudden realization. I had not brought home a souvenir as one would bring from a tour to another land. What I had brought home was something more than a relic, and it was more than a Holy substance from an icon. The realization had suddenly brought me back to center ground – away from my cylinders, beakers and test tubes. What I felt, was not the ominous presence of an unknown specter eerily hiding amongst the shadows. No, this was much different. What I brought home I realized, was much the opposite, providing much warmth, love and understanding. The presence of blessed Mother was now in my home!

### ***Interview 10***

My next interview came through the help of the clergy located at St John the Evangelist Roman Catholic church in Honesdale, PA. This time, I was scheduled to interview an artist – one who also constructs architectural church furnishings, as well as reliquaries to safeguard relics. Therefore, I had the privilege of meeting with Adam McCoy and talking with him about his religious beliefs, and how his work interacts with his belief. Adam describes himself as a thirty-seven-year white male who was raised in various locations of his life such as California, Indiana and finally, Chicago, IL. He currently resides in Dunmore, PA, close to his studio. He has been a life-long Roman Catholic and has been attending church regularly since baptism in the Catholic Church. We both agreed to meet at his studio on a Wednesday.

Before the interview commenced where the two of us sat down and talked about Adam's career as a sculptor, he provided me with a very interesting tour of the building he was working out of which is currently serving as a Catholic School for young boys and girls. It was built in the 1930's as an Eastern Orthodox orphanage and served a fairly large community, the children of coal miners and families in need. It was designed for roughly 120

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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boys and 120 girls. It went through different religious orders but remained as an orphanage until the 1960's. It served more as a foster care at that point. By the 1990's the building had kind of run its course. In the chapel, the priest does both forms of traditional liturgy - a traditional Latin Mass, Roman rite, and Byzantium Roman Catholic Rite as well.

The existing fraternity decided to give up on the project in 2012, and at that point, the facility and alumni got together to form a nonprofit organization. Now, according to Adam, "It's a lot of sports and a lot of classical education." Adam said he was a student there himself from 1999 to 2003, "And I came back from college for a couple of years Adam said. "I've been involved in a combination or roles since 2013. I was teaching for a while full time and ratcheted it down as commissions came. Throughout the school are classrooms, a cafeteria, sculptured statuary from figures in the Gospels, and chapel which also houses a relic as well."

Interviewer Note: Throughout his shop can be found sculptures of notable figures from the bible and New Testament [Figure 25].

Adam: We just had a baby. He's our fourth – we had one who died as a result of extreme prematurity.

Interviewer Note: Adam told me that their baby is actually buried on the grounds close by to the school in the orphanage cemetery. He mentioned how they attend church regularly at St Thomas Moore Parish in Scranton, PA and their pastor is Father Eric Bergman who is a convert from the episcopalian faith. Their pastor has 11 children.

Adam: He kind of converted half his Parish when he transferred to the Roman Catholic church. So, he has a parish in Scranton we like a lot. It's all in English but the liturgy is more like that of the Latin Mass.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer: Where did you receive training for art and sculpture? Was it formal training?

Adam: It was a combination of teenage apprenticeships with different artists, studio assistant, helper. Then two years at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and then a year at Florence Academy. More recently I acquired enough credits to receive a Bachelor's degree from the University of Scranton.

Interviewer: Is your craft specialized for religious Institutions, Churches, etc.?

Adam: I specialize for both public and private clients. And more recently, most of my clients have been institutional Catholic.

Interviewer: What mediums do you like to use the most?

Adam: Just whatever is appropriate for the projects. I'm primarily a sculptor, artist, etc. I work in stone, bronze, plaster. I've always been interested in art history since childhood – but not at the academic level.

Interviewer: What is your best-known work or personal favorite?

Adam: The thing I'm probably best known for is for the Four Crowns Atelier capitals of the Grand Portal [Figure 26].

Interviewer: Do you find inspiration or ideas through your own accord or through clients?

Adam: It's a combination. Usually, the client will have some concept of what they want to communicate. So, it's somewhat already predetermined of subject matter. But there is a lot of opportunity for collaboration and my ideas to come through these things.

Interviewer: Have you ever worked with any other artists in the past?

Adam: Early on as a helper to several different artists. More recently yes through collaboration. There's another sculptor that I sometimes hire to help. Actually, I'm doing that right now with a mosaic at Steubenville College [a Franciscan University]. One of their

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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alumni is designing a painting to be transferred into a mosaic that I'm going to be responsible for installing. That will be a big one like 10 feet by 13 feet tall.

Interviewer: Has any of your own work been reported to be associated with phenomena (i.e., myrrh streaming, holy tears, etc.?)

Adam: There's no correlation yet [laughs]. It's funny as there's no correlation with any Michael Angelo's statues or anything famous in terms of art history. The closer the work of art is to a miracle, the worse the work of art is [laughs] which I don't know what to make of. But it happens all the time in the nineteenth century where you have all these nuns and mystics and they're doing all these personal spiritual diaries – Bernadette, Faustina – those are the ones that are most famous. And then their mystical experience gets translated through the lens of nineteenth century Catholic art which is the worst period in anything ever. And so, you end up with these really powerful devotions with really terrible imagery in my opinion. And the imagery is really only purely conventional nineteenth century Catholic art by third rate people because the best people are working for the very rich and churches and the churches had stopped patronizing really good artists. And so, it drives me up a wall because you'll have this image – the one associated with Lourdes which is so bad, or the one associated with Saint Faustina which is so dreadful. As works of art, no. And those Saints also hated them.

Adam: Bernadette was super, super, annoyed with this. She had this really particular apocalyptic vision of what Mary looked like – she described it faithfully with all of her writings. And when that got translated through the boring nineteenth century artist, it looked just like any other boring nineteenth century image of Mary. So, we lose those things in translation. It would be really fun, if you kind of wanted to do an art project around those

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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things to take Bernadette's description or Faustina's description and really do it good in a weird way as it is. These mystical visions are always odd – they're dream-like, their metaphorical, and so on and they're not cute [Adam here is pointing to the artistic descriptions and interpretations of the visions at this point.] Well, that's my reaction – you got me going [laughs].

Adam: The only exception, I think is our Lady of Guadalupe which is kind of objectively, which is a marvelous artistic expression. And as far as any scientists can show, is kind of inexplicable as an object in the universe. So, when Mary actually makes it as a work of art, it's good. But when it's inspired by one of these miracles, it's terrible.

Interviewer Note: After a small discussion on the work that I do as a scientist in the archaeological realm, objectivity vs subjectivity, Andrew had continued.

Adam: The idea of the that there is any debate about this is silly. I'm fascinated by science – I listen to folks talking about it all day when I'm working. Half of the time there is popular explanation of some scientific thing. I love that stuff – physics especially. But I'm just wondering why a bunch of archaeologists give a shit about what you believe? [laughs]. My father had just passed away three weeks ago but he was an architect and he was known for the revival of classicism in the field of art. You know, he did a lot of important buildings. But he was also sort of the leading director of the school of architecture at Notre Dame when they made the shift from a more normal program to one specifically focused to a classical architecture program. But in your mentioning of archaeology, he got teased. He was kind of coming from the post-Modernist thing in architecture and that was kind of his avenue. He was really good – he was probably like as post-Modernist as you can be in the 70's and 80's. But he kind of made the mistake of just embracing the classicism and saying let's do it right

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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instead of doing it in a silly way. So that was unforgivable in one of his - one of the professors at one point said, “well what is it that you want to do?” Do you want to become an applied archaeologist? [laughs]. So that’s always been a family anecdote.

Interviewer: What is your take or perspective on relics coming from the background you have?

Adam: There’s something kind of new within Christianity’s relationship to art for one thing. There’s like a new thing on the world when Christianity interacts with art. It’s kind of different when paganism interacts with art. That’s one element. All those things that existed in a Pagan universe you can still find in the Christian universe but there’s something added to that. You will always get people with hang-ups like “Oh is this a pagan imagery in a church!” That’s all silly because we can do whatever we want - you can go to Hell [Adam is addressing accuser at this point]. So, if you look in the most authentic Byzantine iconography, say of the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, there’s always this little nymph or river nymph – the little river gods. So, there’s some God in the river Jordan and he appears in the iconography as such, that’s because he’s sort of this minor deity and there’s no contradiction or major problem with representing him in the river as a human figure. Even more so, there’s more tradition than we’re familiar with regard to sort of understanding spiritual power that aren’t like the Trinity. So, a lot of modern Christianity has tried to wipe clean everything except for this sort of purely authentic theologically correct Trinitarian and understanding of the Divine nature – and everything else is hogwash. But to the church fathers and the earlier Christian period there’s a hierarchy of creatures and things below God but different from human and so all that stuff has its place and is important. So, there’s

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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something added, but there's something also rejected which is strongly rejected – the worship of images. But we incorporate all this pagan stuff into our art.

Adam: My favorite story has to do with the Quatour Coronati and you can only find their biographies in the oldest kind of books of legendary Saints and stuff. But these were four sculptors of the Roman Empire that were renowned for their fame as talented artists and they became martyrs. The story of their martyrdom and recording of their martyrdom is fascinating. But there's an historical Roman document from some Roman bureaucrat who expounds on the story and think it gives you kind of what you need to know about third century, fourth century Roman Christian art. Because this bureaucrat is this totally normal Pagan-Roman guy, and he doesn't understand these Christians and what motivates them. And it's clear I think when you read what he writes because what he writes is: [Adam then retrieves the brochure on his work from the Four Crowns Atelier and begins the quote.]

“Although they raised no objection to the fashioning of profane images depicting Victoria (Nike), Cupid, and the Chariot of the Sun, these sculptors refused to make a statue of Aesculapius for a heathen temple. For this, they were put into leaden caskets and drowned in the Rive Save.” Porhyrus, a Roman bureaucrat, was perplexed. He could not see any distinction between the goddess Victoria and the god Aesculapius. Christians understand that the difference lies in the context and intent of each work. Depictions of Nike, Cupid, and Apollo are frequently used in classical and Christian iconography to represent abstract ideas like victory, love, and wisdom. These images are distinct from idols because they are not objects or worship; instead, they point towards ideas and truths greater than themselves.

Adam continued. “Delighting in its inherent nuance and beauty, early Christian artists maintained and expanded the symbolic language of the antique world preserving many beautiful traditions. But they also affirmed that, without God's grace, their images would be deaf, blind, and dumb; and they preferred death to the perpetuation of dead idolatry” (Smith, Four Crowns Atelier brochure). Nobody talks about this. As far as I know, I'm the only person who's interested in this little story. The thing they were objecting to is that this was

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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going to be the cult image in the temple that people would do sacrifice, incense – animals too. So, they were perfectly happy to make a sort of abstract representation of the concept of love but they weren't willing to make an object that was intended to be worshipped. So that's the big distinction. Again, Post Renaissance – there's sort of this great divorce in the Enlightenment period where the State powers say, alright, we're taking Greek mythology, Roman mythology and you guys can keep Christian mythology and Christian Saints. And we're just going to split up the kids that way. But before that, both sides used equally, both pairs of imagery. I think things were more interesting in that period and they just became less interesting on both sides since. Once you have the Enlightenment, once you have that kind of non-religious state, they kind of need an iconography that's just stripped down of religion. But in the twentieth century, they just stripped all the iconography and there's none anymore.

Adam: So, there's something added and then something incorporated. The added thing though, is better expressed in eastern practice than western practice for the most part at least to this day. And that is the total integration of the image into the liturgy. The Greeks really formally incorporated the sort of sacred image into the liturgical practice and preserved a very strict adherence to that. And the west very informally kind of tolerated the image – but very few things. There's a few things on the crucifix that are sort of counseled documents but those are pretty limited. And so, the west had more freedom to sort of explore ideas theologically of art in the church for better or for worse and the east had a more coherent association of less freedom from that. But I think with both traditions, there have been numerous associations or miraculous images, both man-made and sort of divinely created. It's a much more important dimension to Christian liturgy and spirituality than has been understood for quite a while. So that lack of emphasis has probably been a problem for the west because the east didn't take down the emphasis as much as we have.

Interviewer: Where do you think this is all going as far as our religion, as you and I share? Will it be more secularized to the point where everything is closing down, or more as voices coming from the global south and east?

Adam: I have no expertise but from casual observing. There is something that I found profound at least which I never understood in this sort of phrase, the gates of hell shall never prevail against the church, right, from Christ's words in the Gospel. And my interpretation of that has always been because it's phrased in an interesting way. I can't really break down the grammar properly but the grammar of that sentence is kind of weird, right? The gates of Hell shall not prevail against. If you just substitute like the boogey man shall not prevail against such and such, you imagine that thing as the aggressor, and its coming towards the thing that's not going to be prevailed upon. But if you think of that gate or the walls are these totally stationary things, and my pastor actually explained this to me once in some conversation, that can only make sense if you're the aggressor. And the gates are remaining stationary – the gates can't prevail against you. And because of the grammar, you never think of that and his pointing it out made a lot more sense. There's kind of this additional layer. This is only going to be the promise if you're actually on the offense. Storming the castle of hell versus if you're on the defense, that sentence doesn't make any sense – it doesn't apply. So those kinds of promises come with these sorts of explicit caveats. And the caveat is that you have to be on offense to receive that gift or something. So, I think to the degree that we're not on offense then you're not going to have that promise. But maybe that is changing at this point. I think in general; my sort of cynical views is just that we've kind of tried everything that doesn't work for a hundred years. You can start trying things that work now just by the process of elimination.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer: I had mentioned the growing voice of the global south and east to Adam and how it is becoming a major voice in the world today.

Adam: I think your comments about the global south are spot on. We are currently experiencing the thing of being evangelized by Africans from Africa, who have nothing to do there because of the entire overflow of priests so they are sent over here and so on and so that is exactly what happened before in terms of various continental Europeans needing to be re-evangelized from Ireland – you know a couple hundred years after they had done the same. So, these are patterns. These are symbolic truths that just cycle through and its normal. I think in general; you get to the end of a line. It's interesting in the popular culture on the internet inflectual community like everybody is done with new atheism. Those people who were popular ten years ago are all over and nobody cares about them anymore. Those things – they kind of spur up for ten minutes then that's it.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use in prayer.)

Adam: I don't think we have any first-class relics at home. I think we might have some piece of something from Popes like John Paul II somewhere. It's not like it's been a massive practice of mine, I'm actually not any good at stuff like that. I'm Catholic, I'm committed. My wife is way better Catholic than I am – more in terms like just having a spiritual practice. So no, intellectually I find relics very fascinating and I try to just pay attention to them and pay reverence to them like in a church if they're ever there and I love the really old medieval ones that are like entire skulls. I went (and saw in Greece) once, when in the city of Petros - which is like a Port City. They had Saint Andrew's skull. And the Imelda [Imelda Lambertini] one and I probably wouldn't have acquired it if not for that

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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sculpture [Figure 28]. So, I think it's terrific. It's kind of like all these kind of things - they need to be rejuvenated. You need to kind of remove the idea that this is some weird thing little ladies do – like my grandmothers into that or something. I've dealt with them professionally well in terms of designing an altar or something to make room for the relics and figure out the dimensions.

Interviewer: How is it working with the clergy?

Generally, it's fine At least in my career, I have two or three clients a year and so it's pretty small scale and there's not a tremendous demand but the people who want to work with me and have some original work of art tends to be pretty dynamic interesting people. So, I've enjoyed that over the years.

Interviewer: Was their cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Adam: Certainly, with our babies who have been so premature there's been a lot of spiritual practice, especially with my wife's side. You mentioned the oil from that miraculous icon, my wife would have some of that in the crib with the babies when they were born. You know, the miracle there, we owe our kids to this odd character. The story of the incubator for babies is most absurd. The story as I know it or as I come to understand it is...this European engineer comes in the early twentieth century to the US and he sort of sees the chicken incubator thing. And he sees eventually the problem of how many premature babies are dying in the cities and basically invents the incubator using the same technology that has been used in the twentieth century to raise chickens but for human babies. Something that would keep them warm and allows some protections from excess germs.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Adam: Simple technology. And he just spent ten years peddling this around to different hospitals trying to sell his invention which was a total failure because nobody wanted to adopt this thing. And finally, kind of out of desperation, he set up space at Coney Island and he got his space at Coney Island. He got a couple of nurses to agree to be his employees and he set five or six of these incubators as kind of a freak show and then he would go to the local hospitals and say to these women – because the women were just sent home with whatever five-pound baby they had and he would say you can loan me this baby for a month and I'll put it in this incubator and maybe we can save it. And he did and it was all funded and treated as a freak show seeing these very small infants in these glass kinds of things. And they were well attended by nurses and they were being taken care of and many of them didn't survive. And it took something like twenty years before this freak show became popular or normalized in several different amusement parks in the country until finally the medical profession agreed to actually use it in hospitals. So, this was sort of a thirty-year process. The miracle to my mind is that anything that ever happens that's good because it takes someone like that doing something as ridiculous to adopt a new technology that has gotten to the point where we were saying earlier. That's where you literally can save these 20-week-old babies sometimes. And certainly these 25-week-old babies like my son and it's just a tremendous amount of intervention at the hospital, the nurses the doctors put forward there but my son is now a thriving five-year-old kid running around knocking other kids over. Those are the miracles in my mind.

As the interview drew to a close, I photographed various works of art Adam completed or was currently working on while he tended to handling a business call on his mobile phone [Figure 27]. On the drive home, I began to think about what Adam had said - about the classics and how later art from the nineteenth century impacted him, and his work.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

His taste and style most definitely is influenced by the medieval and renaissance periods. How he views the Saints and how the Saints should be reflected back to the viewer does reveal an appreciation and preference for older, classical style of art. His outlook appears to take into consideration, how the Saints themselves may want to be viewed in their own time. His example of Saint Bernadette makes that clear. He views the art from the Age of the Enlightenment to the nineteenth century that typically reveals a secularized style, as one that portrays the Saints and visions they had as boring and uninteresting – perhaps to the point where he feels the artist was missing out on the message.

### ***Interview 11***

Ted is a seventy-one-year-old Caucasian who was raised in Honesdale, PA. He still lives in Honesdale, but only began regularly attending church at the age of twenty-three as a Roman Catholic.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Ted: Yes

Interviewer: Name of Saint or Martyr associated with relic(s)?

Ted: Blessed Mother, and St Joseph – the Patron Saint of Carpenters.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Ted: I pray for souls in purgatory. I consider them Saints as well.

Interviewer: How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Ted: I pray about an hour and a half every day, also to Guardian Angels, Mother Theresa.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Ted: No.

Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Ted: I think some of them have been answered, but of them are going to be answered in a different way.

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the Saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

Ted: The knee of the Risen Christ in Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Water droplets - all over. You wipe them off, and they reappear. And they have been tested and they are human tears. I believe the statue was put there 1991. But it didn't start leaking tears until around 2004. Some of what I read is because [the knees] that's as high as the Blessed Mother could reach while Christ was on the cross.

Which Saint do you most frequently include in prayer?

Ted: St. Joseph

Interviewer: Other religious identity held in past?

Ted: No, always been Roman Catholic.

Ted paused a moment and continued: My wife is bi-polar. Are you familiar with the Devine Mercy? In the book, she's recommending that everyone do the Divine Mercy, every day at 3:00 pm [the hour of Jesus' death]. When I came back from the cabin, my wife had all these papers spread all over the floor. She said "we're going to Medjugorje." I truly believe that was divine intervention – to get her to go there. As soon as we got close to where the apparitions were happening, there was a peace, that came over us and I can't explain it to this day. We were there five days and the whole time we were there, that peace was there. Once we left, it was back to the regular real world. The site is located in Kosovo. Phenomenon has been occurring since in 1981. A little background...there are six kids that know 10 secrets. When the secrets are going to be made available to the world, 7 days prior to the secrets be

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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announced, the visionaries will tell the priest which has already been contacted. That priest will pray for 7 days and fast. Three days prior to the event happening, that priest will notify the world. There will be a permanent sign given (the third secret) that no one will be able to explain. The theory is that the twenty fifth of June 2021, is 40 years, which represents 40 years in the desert, 40 days here, they think it's very symbolic but nobody knows because the visionaries will not say the secrets until such time they are allowed to.

Ted: The interesting thing about that is that they've taken one of these visionaries and placed them under hypnosis and asked them about the secrets and they don't reveal them. They're protected in that manner. There's also a parchment paper - although they really don't know what it is - with the secrets written on it. But nobody can read it. But when the secrets will become available, they will be able to read it from the paper. They can't decipher it. [The Vatican has examined this object. Ted then showed me a book that one of the visionaries wrote.] We met her when she was there. She was at that time, getting the apparitions daily, in her house. And that's where a small group of people could go and she was there. I was in the same room with her. She's in a tremendous amount of back pain right now, as all the visionaries ever had in the past, will all suffer. And she has suffered. That's my speculation. Pope John Paul II has read some of the secrets. After one of the visionaries died, she had a vision of him [Pope John Paul II] with the Blessed Mother, all in white, very happy and younger in age.

The interview came to a conclusion and I could not help but wonder how the information the six children received that Ted talked about could be related to other locations where visions of the Blessed Mother had taken place. Ted had indeed appeared at peace with himself. He had a very calming demeanor. And so, I too wonder as a Christian if the secrets

the six children received will ever become known. I am hesitant to neither dismiss it, or completely accept it as factual at this time. In the future, my belief in the secrets could change. But this would also suggest to me that the world, as I know it, was about to change.

***Interview 12***

Fr Stephen is forty-one-year-old male of Eastern European descent and also shares a Polish, Slavic and Carpathian ancestry. He was raised in Binghamton, NY and currently resides in Lake Ariel, PA, just ten minutes away from St Tikhon's Monastery in Weymart, PA. He regularly attended church from birth to the age of sixteen and then stopped for a couple of years. At age twenty-two, he converted to Eastern Orthodox and is now a member of the clergy at St Basils' Eastern Orthodox Church. I had met Fr Stephen at his church. The Divine Liturgy was still in progress when I arrived.

Interviewer: The vestments in Eastern Orthodoxy is a bit different from the vestments I'm used to seeing in the Roman Catholic churches.

Fr Stephen: Well, it's interesting because if you ever watch the third Godfather movie, they show the Italian Catholic priest, and his vestments looks similar to ours. So, I think after Vatican II, there was a lot of changes in what happened. Well, even from the standpoint of like relics, I know a friend of mine who is a priest. He does like different pilgrimages around the world and he was in Italy. I guess he got in contact with somebody and he was saying that if it's an Orthodox priest or bishop whoever wrote [to] one of the Catholic cardinals in Italy and said, "can we have the relics of first century Saints?" We could have them because I guess the way they understand it is that their grace has been "used up."

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer Note: Grace according to Roman Catholic tradition refers to the underserved and free assistance granted by God to become children of God, or those that partake in the divine nature of God.

Fr Stephen: That was the way he explained it to me. It's the way they told them. It's like this whole thing with selling indulgences; you had extra grace that are saved up by the Saints and the church could dispense it, so the whole idea was that the dispenser was empty with this one because it's been twenty centuries. I'm being a little facetious but that's the basic implications. And a lot of times, they're not necessarily venerated in some of the churches which is interesting.

Interviewer: Who would you say is your favorite Saint or one you more frequently seek assistance from?

Fr Stephen: A lot of times I pray to John the Baptist and normally in an Orthodox church, they normally have an icon of him, at least in the Russian tradition. St Nicholas is another one. Very popular – the life he lived and the work he did in his lifetime. It was kind of like one of these people that everyone would share stories and they would say, he worked X, Y, Z miracle and they start getting shared. They're real people that can serve as examples for our own lives. There are Saints that even walk the earth now and we don't know them. I always tell this in a sermon, A priest friend of mine – his aunt – when she died, he was there praying then she died. His two boys were young at the time and when she died, her face lit up like the sun. She had been very pious woman. He was looking at her and his kids can see the same. Bishop Michael – I think he's their rector of the seminary at St Tikhon's. He had a parishioner at one time in southeast PA that happened to her when he was there. She reposed and her face lit up.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Fr Stephen: So, these things happen a lot and it's like Saints walking around us. They were never canonized. They were just a regular parishioner that sat in a pew and probably died in the 90's or 2000's. That's the thing. There are Saints that we canonize but there are some that are known only to God. And a lot of times is what happens in the Orthodox church, it's not top down. It's local veneration. They may even begin making icons of the person but they won't put a halo around them. And then after enough local veneration, they will officially recognize them. For example, Alaskan native Matushka Olga, a priest wife. [also known as Olinka, whom was an Eastern Orthodox priest's wife from Kwethluk village, on the Kuskokwim River in Alaska] She was one of those that would help. If they needed a little money, or ran out of foods, it would mysteriously appear. After she reposed, people would share stories about her and then started appearing to people. So, there's been talk about canonizing her. It's interesting that when people die sometimes, their bodies smell like myrrh. That will happen. There are things that will tell you that this person is special. Arch Bishop Dimitri - he was the bishop in the south when I was first chrismating in the Orthodox church and they buried him in Texas – you know, in the hot, Texas sun. Well, they exhumed him and he's incorrupt and he smells like myrrh. I don't think they even waited ten years after he reposed. He's a very special guy. He was old when he visited us. At one point, he was getting up at coffee hour and walking and talking to people because he was a pastor at heart.

Fr Stephen: I think that's what really interests me a lot. It's one thing like, I read a lot about the Saints every day, I see what's happened throughout the years, I've been through the books several times. The interesting thing is when you get that personal touch. You see holiness or miracles or whatever and it hits you on the ground level. That really is where the rubber meets the road. And when you can talk about that in sermon with somebody, that's

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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powerful. And I don't think that necessarily it gets mentioned enough. My interest has always been more or less the mysticism of the church. Because if it's not mysticism, then what is it? Psychology or something like that? What would be the difference then between this and the rotary club? We have our own traditions, we do things a certain way but if it's something actually happening during service now, then wow - that's something!

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Fr Stephen: We have two. We have Saint Herman and Saint Basil (a little box). In the Orthodox church, the Liturgy always has to be done – you have what's called antimins. So, it's a cloth that sits on the altar, that's unfolded when you're doing consecration of the gifts. It's opened and you always have it at the relic of a martyr in there. And antimins basically means instead of the table. So, in the early church if you didn't have it, you couldn't do the relics over a tomb of the martyr, then you would have this [antimin], and use literally any table and the and a consecrated altar would have relics in it as well. So, every church has relics but the antimins – it has to be a martyr.

Interviewer Note: An antimin is one of the most important furnishings of the altar in many Eastern Christian liturgical traditions. It is a rectangular piece of cloth of either linen or silk, typically decorated with representations of the Descent of Christ from the Cross, the Four Evangelists, and inscriptions related to the Passion. Often a small relic of a martyr is sewn into it. The antimin is required in order to celebrate the Eucharist.

Interviewer: Was there any cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, where the intercession of a Saint was requested?

Fr Stephen: I don't know precisely in this church but I'll tell you a story. Saint Nektarios is a very powerful Saint in our church and he died in the early 1900's I believe.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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But he had a rough life. He was being bounced around from place to place, but anyway, he works amazing miracles now. There's this church down in Charlotte, NC. We have friends there. They go to St Nektarios church and they have a relic of him and they have oil. To my understanding, the oil comes from all different sites around the world. Whenever someone goes on a pilgrimage, they dump a little of that oil here. And it's near his relics. We have a little at our house of this oil. And what we'll do is – if the kids are sick, we will anoint them or if we're sick, we'll anoint ourselves.

Fr Stephen: My one daughter, when she was really small, she hurt her arm – not quite dislocated. She was playing one day and she hurt her arm. I said her a prayer and got this oil of Saint Nektarios and rubbed it on her arm and probably 10 min later she's happy and bouncing around with no problem. Another man I knew - he converted. He married a woman from Macedonia. He had a tumor the size of a grapefruit on his colon. And so, she [his wife] was anointing him with this oil every day. They were gonna take his colon out because he couldn't separate one from the other. So, they went in and it came out sooner than it was supposed to and they came out to her and said, what's happened? The doctors said, "Well, we went in there and instead of being this thing the size of a grapefruit, it detached itself from the colon and it was flat like a pancake that was full of some weird oily substance we couldn't quite explain."

Fr Stephen: And this is the oil of Saint Nektarios. He walks from place to place. They have piles of shoes near his reliquary where his body is – and – they're worn out! On his body, they have to keep replacing the shoes because they wore out. There's a story about him where they couldn't get a bishop or couldn't get a priest for a long time because it's a remote area. They finally wrote the bishop and said thanks for sending us a priest. They were like

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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what are you talking about? He came, he married people, he buried people, he baptized, chrismated, preached, he was fantastic! “Well, who’s this priest, we don’t know anything about it!” So, they went up there. They looked at the records and it said Archbishop Nektarios. And they took it to a handwriting expert and he said, this is his handwriting. So, things like that happen around him all the time.

Fr Stephen: I’ve another story about him. There’s a lady in Charlotte, NC No kids, no family and is going in for surgery. She has an icon of Saint Nektarios, and that’s like her main Saint. The surgery is no problem. The doctor comes out and says the surgery went well, everything is fine. But who is that old priest that came to visit you? He’s out there pacing back and forth and looked like he was praying the whole time. She says, what are you talking about? My priest is a young man. What did he look like?” He looked at the icon and said, “Well, it looked just like him!” This isn’t some story we tell to kids from years ago, this is like within recent memory. I was told the story 10 years ago at his monastery, in Roscoe, NY and this one priest friend of mine went there one day and the doors were locked. Yet here’s this beautiful music coming from the church. They look inside and there’s nobody there.

Fr Stephen: St Nektarios - that probably would be a major one that’s at least really in our lives. I have most of my prayers on my phone here. They make it in kindle form. What I normally do is – well I have an Akathist. [An Akathist is a type of hymn usually recited by Eastern Orthodox or Eastern Catholic Christians and is often dedicated to a Saint, holy event, or one of the Holy Trinity.] So, there’s different Akathist’s you do to different Saints and it’s kind of like the priests I know who use this as intercessor type of thing. So, someone comes for counselling, we ask what the problem is, and they’ll respond that we are having to do deal with this. So, then we’ll go and do an Akathist to that Saint who helps with that sort of

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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thing. And it seems to resolve the problem more so than his advice because he's either A- nobody would listen to my advice or B – it wouldn't be helpful to them. But every time we did the Akathist, it worked out well. I have one to the Virgin Mary, Theotokos. Arch Angel Michael, St Nektarios, Saint Xenia of Saint Petersburg. Because it was at a time when we were looking for a new parish, we wanted to move up to this area. I started doing an Akathist and not only did I get one parish, but I ended up with two in the area. So, it worked out really well. And we're very happy in this area and so are our kids. So, I would say that those are the four that I'm normally doing every day.

Interviewer: I noticed you mentioned your kids. So, in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, are priests allowed to marry?

Fr Stephen: In the Eastern Orthodox church, married men can become priest, but priests can't marry. So that's the way it's been since the beginning. I think the church in Spain, was always celibate, and that carried out throughout the rest of the Western church. As you got to the barbarian lands, they were married. I know one priest in Harrisburg. He can trace the priest hood back in his family for about 500 years. Sometimes the priest's daughter marries a man that is in a seminary Or, the son of a priest becomes a priest. It's nice. They see me here doing my thing and my little one - my son has a rattle and sometimes he'll put a cape on and will go around and start sensing stuff.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about your conversion you went through?

Fr Stephen: I was baptized in the Presbyterian Church, and probably was attending there until I was 16. I went back when I was 18. Once I had a vehicle and in Grad school, I was like, "I'm going to check out this Orthodox church," and it just felt like home. There

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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was one guy at the Seminary. He was an atheist through life and led a colorful life eventually became orthodox. And is a fantastic priest.

Following the interview with Fr Stephen, I was invited to see the icon and kiss it as all others of the Eastern Orthodox have done for generations. The beautiful aroma of the incense that was released during the Divine Liturgy was still very fresh in the air. And again, the aromas brought back so many happy memories of my own church at St Aloysius located in the Catskills. It's during moments like this, that borders the transcendental in which my conscience is in a dream state. To be in the presence of Holy objects – relics and icons – in a sacred space limits other senses momentarily, or at least removes all other non-religious thought. Knowing or sensing oneself is in the presence of the Holy or divine is humbling. It is as if the front door to Heaven has just opened and the emotional response one experiences at that very moment can overwhelm the same oneself. This rush of pure spirit is not the same sensation of spirit that a Saint in suffering would have – that of pain - that many of the Saints had undergone. No, the sense I detect during moments of this transcendence is one of love, forgiveness, and joy. It is as if God is inviting us to accept membership in his Kingdom. And yet, there I am, always at the door afraid to enter completely. Here, I can sense the holiness and the state of sacredness. It feels as if a family I haven't seen in years is inside and is inviting me to step in through the threshold. But I am held back from walking through this entranceway by fear and by my sense of attachment to the physical world I come from. I have so much to do in life. I cannot completely give myself away yet to the sacred. There is much more to learn and more to explore. It reminds me of a dream I had a year ago in which I am at heaven's gate. The gate is open and connected to a long house with relatives and family members that have all passed away and are inviting me to join them at the table for dinner. But I remain steadfast. Most go back to joyful conversation with glasses clinking and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

food being passed from person to person. One of the two younger members I do not recognize approaches me and asks, “why do you not come in?” I can’t. I have commitments and more to do before I can rest in the comfort of this long house” I respond. “You will know when it’s time” she responds. She embraces me, turns and heads back to the table. The longhouse is quickly whooshed away and I am awake.

### ***Interview 13***

I had a great pleasure of talking with Lisa, a sixty-two-year-old woman of German and Irish descent. Lisa was raised in Rockland County, NY and resided in Livingston Manor, NY for eleven years, from 1987-1998, oddly enough, the exact same town where I was raised during my formative years. She currently resides in Honesdale, PA and declares herself to be Roman Catholic. I met Lisa at her home in Honesdale after a sudden rain storm interrupted our original plans to meet at the rectory of St Mary Magdalen’s Catholic church.

Interviewer: What Age were you when you were regularly attending Church?

Lisa: As a Child. My family was very devout and we did attend every Sunday. There was a time in my 20’s that I lost touch with the church for a little while. I guess I really came back in earnestness when my oldest son was born. And he is now thirty-two. To the chagrin of my husband who wanted to sleep in on Sundays, I said, “Nope, we have a responsibility and we need to get back into this habit.”

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics?

Lisa: I have access to access to 3<sup>rd</sup> class relics.

Interviewer: Name of Saint or Martyr associated with relic(s)?

Lisa: Saint Jude and Saint John Paul II

Interviewer Note: Saint Jude is often represented with a flame around his head, which is representative of the Holy Spirit that he and the other Apostles received from Jesus during

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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the Pentecost. He is also considered as the patron Saint of lost causes and desperate cases. He is recognized as a Saint by the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran, and Anglican Communion church.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Lisa: My greatest devotion is to the Blessed Mother from the time I was a child. I'm the youngest of five children. We all went to Catholic grammar school. There was a sodality [a Roman Catholic religious guild] that seventh and eighth graders belonged to. At that time, I had no idea what that even meant. But my older siblings were given miraculous medals - very nice ones - solid sterling silver. One of them, really had no use for it and didn't want it, and gave it to me as the little sister. I wore it constantly - to the point that I had to take it to a jeweler because the ring at the top edge of the metal had worn away. There was nothing left there [laughs]. When the jeweler looked at it, he said, "I'm going put a bail on this." I said, "Put a good sized one on it so it can go with any sized chain." "Okay, he said, but I'm soldering this."

Lisa: When I was probably six or seven, when I was wearing that medal on our sailboat, it was a twenty-four foot sail boat with seven of us on board. So, this was not luxury cruising, this was family time. One morning, I woke up and I realized that the medal wasn't on and I was in a bit of a panic. The chain was completely gone. The medal itself was underneath my pillow. Obviously, it happened during the night. I was in this bunk in the boat. If it fell down into a crack, it would be gone. There would be no way to search for it because of the construction of the boat. So, without knowing or really understanding anything about the miraculous medal, I just always wore it. When I was eight, my mother came down with Multiple Sclerosis. It was very traumatic and difficult for the family. My

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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oldest brother at the time (ten years older than I am) had just joined the Air Force. It was during Vietnam. So, lots of upheaval. The whole family dynamics changed. My mother was now an invalid who was very, very bitter. I at the age of eight and had a very tough time understanding and dealing with it. By the time I was twelve, I didn't like my mother. She was always focused and concerned about herself. And she was always feeling sorry for herself. It was her unfortunate reality. And a teacher in school taught us that year the *memrorare* - a Roman Catholic prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It comes from the Latin word *remember*. So, I was very struck by the promises of that prayer - that anyone praying this devotion to the Blessed Mother - she answers it. And I talked to my father about it. He said, "Maybe you should pray that for your mom."

Lisa: So, I was approaching puberty. I was dealing with my own issues and my mom was still so focused on her problems. I started paying that prayer every day. And one day, I woke up having this very clear, cut plan in my head as to how I should go forward with dealing with my mother's issues. She always wanted me to come in after school and to sit and chat with her and tell her about what was going on in school and stuff. But inevitably, it would turn into her feelings for herself. As a kid, I could not cope with this. I had this very clear plan; that from here on out, I would go in and chat with mom. But as soon as the conversation turned around to her and her problems, I would excuse myself - that I had homework to do, I had to take care of the dog, I had to unload the dishwasher, or I had to do some dusting. So, this gave me the space and control I needed to cope with everything. And I don't know when I realized that that was the answer to my prayer, but it was so clear and what I found out later on, was that God answered my prayer.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Lisa: By the time I was seventeen, my mom had gotten better to the point that she had gained more of her mobility, she figured out a way to cope with life and how to handle things. But my father was pushing for me to go to a local college, instead of giving me the option to go away to school. My older siblings always had the option to go away to school. It was one of my older brothers who was asking me one day about it in front of mom. I said Well, I'd really like to go to Elmira college but dad is pushing for Pace. My brother had asked why? I was getting annoyed at Leo. "Dad wants me to go to Pace!" But why? And I said, "Because he wants me to stay home!" And with that, my mother all of a sudden said, "He can't do that to you." It was like my brother Leo was forcing me to confront it with my mother and I finally did. I said to my mother, "Mom, I've been taking care of the house all these years. That's why dad wants me to stay home." And my mother said, "He can't do that to you. I will start doing more around the house." This was my senior year in High School and she started doing more around the house and taking more responsibility back on caring for the house so that I could go away to college. I saw all of this as God taking a hand and playing a role as Mary being there and the prayers being answered.

Lisa: I would say my next significant encounter was many years later. I was married and we were living in Livingston Manor. My husband Bernie had been a marine in Vietnam and suffered from PTSD. So, things were not always pleasant around the house. He was having flashbacks. He was getting pressured at work and it was just doing a number on him. And his psychiatrist in the VA was saying, "Bernie, you need to retire. You need to get a disability retirement." My husband was very old school and was very no, no, no. But things kept getting progressively worse. And one of the big things was - when I would discuss it with him - is everyone is telling you to retire. "What are we gonna do for money," he asked.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

I had the answer. “From God...it will all work out.” He got money from the VA. They had bumped him up to 75% disability. He said he should be getting 100%. They went down to Manhattan with his file to fight that fight. They gave him 100%.

Interviewer Note: Bernie had fought similar battles with Social Security, and meeting with a judge who was sensitive to veteran issues, he received his full benefits. So, it would appear the faith that Lisa held, proved to come through again for her and her husband Bernie. The interview had ended as a friend of Lisa’s was driving in from the main road. Lisa appeared very happy and comfortable as we hugged and said our goodbyes.

### ***Interview 14***

My next interview was with a family that the Honesdale Catholic Parish me into contact with. Jeffrey is thirty-two years and a teacher of math and physics at a local Public High School. While he would not claim any ethnicity, he did state that he was raised his whole life in Wayne County, PA and has been attending the Roman Catholic church since his baptism in 1998. His wife, Lizzie, we will talk to shortly. Having accepted an invitation to a fabulous dinner with the family, I gladly met with them at their residence. After a group prayer we all participated in, we all sat for dinner and I began the interview process with them as the three little ones (daughters) were actively engaged in play time. The smallest, a baby, was nursed. It was a beautiful scene from start to finish – the moment I arrived in my silver VW Beetle to the moment I departed and wished the family well.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use in prayer.)

Jeffrey: My parents recued two relics from going to auction – when our friend died from our parish. One of them is John Neumann, the Bishop. [from Philadelphia, PA and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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where there currently is a shrine to the Saint. Neumann is the only US male to be canonized by the Roman Catholic church.] He was the bishop here in Philadelphia. They also have a relic of the true cross but is without true documentation. It just says “CRUX” on it. That’s all. We had Saint Elizabeth [Saint Elizabeth Anne Seton] here for a year. She was visiting us for a year. But we don’t have any relics ourselves.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Jeffrey: Yes, I have a special devotion to Anthony of Padua. [Anthony of Padua was a Portuguese priest and friar of the Franciscan Order. He was noted for his powerful preaching, and expertise and knowledge of Scripture. He was very devoted to the poor and less fortunate as well as the sick In 1946, he was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.] as well as to Saint Joseph, consecrated to Our Lady and a number of other Saints. Lots of Saints.

Interviewer: How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Jeffrey: We have family patrons so we were married on the Feast of Saint Joachim and Anne [Saints Anne and Joachim, were the parents of the Virgin Mary. St. Anne herself is one of the patron saints of Canada and Brittany. As we learned before, she is also the patron Saint for women in labor. And because both Saints - Anne and Joachim are also the grandparents of Jesus, they are also the Patron Saints of grandparents.] So, I guess our first family devotion is to Joachim and Anne. I had proposed to her [Sarah] on the Feast Day a year earlier. We like them because they are depicted on a ceiling in some chapel in Rome. They are the only Saints depicted as kissing. So, we like that.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Lizzie: Usually if there is some [child] sick, the first thing I ask is if they have a devotion to a Saint. Then we will ask through the intercession of a Saint. Things tend to

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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happen around feast Days. If someone is having like a surgery, someone will say I having surgery on August 28<sup>th</sup>. Well obviously, that falls on the Feast of Saint Augusta. We're having friends over on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. So were going to ask for special prayers from Saint Thomas the Apostle during this weekend for the visit. So, we follow the calendar as far as feast days are concerned. I appreciate the way churches have feast days throughout the year for Saints to pray to – to ask for prayers. And there are things that happen in our family that occur on Feast Days. For example, there was a surgery that happened to Catherine [their daughter] on the Feast of Saint Claire. And the funny thing was that we were actually by the relic of Saint Claire two days earlier [two days prior to the accident.] So last year, our daughters were involved in an accident that left Catharine with a broken femur. And the day before, the Sunday before we went to Sunday Mass, I brought her to Saint Claire. The next day, they were involved in a very serious accident which she [Catherine] was really hurt. The fact of her existence is a miracle. I don't know how I think about that. I don't know if I subscribe that to her - healing to her. It seems as if her prayers had helped throughout this.

Jeffrey: Besides being physically healed, there was a lot of spiritual protection. That was given to us during that time – protection and healing – emotional healing, spiritual healing that happened during that time. We were very protected – meaning we could have become very bitter towards each other and towards the people we were with. It was very easy for spirit division to enter into that situation in our hearts. And that we were spared in a remarkable way.

Lizzie: That's the thing about relics – they're filled with Jesus. My friend had a profound conversion experience with the tibia of Mary Magdalen. It was on tour. And she was interested in the Catholic church at the time. She was agnostic. As she was asking

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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questions, and seeking answers, she went to some people she was getting to know through the church and was interested in the relic, which is unusual, because if you're not Catholic, (or even are Catholic), you're going to see someone's body parts [laughs]. It was a little strange. And she went and she describes going, not like with an understanding of what she was doing, and she started weeping. Mary Magdalen was in front of her and she just started weeping. It was a big moment. Later she was baptized, confirmed, etc. Now in September, she'll be making solemn vows with the Hawthorne Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, NY!

Jeffrey: They minister to terminal cancer patients. Encountering Mary Magdalen (for Lizzie's friend) was one moment of Grace – the movement of the heart.

Lizzie: She went to Rome and saw the Mary. It wasn't really Jesus - I just saw Mary and her love. So, I count seeing the relic of Mary Magdalen very important.

Jeffrey: One note on our understanding of relics though is that the Saints have no power on their own. What we understand the Saints to be is people who are currently alive because it all comes from Jesus. Jesus died, and he rose from the dead and this is the centrality of our faith as Christians. So, when we profess Christ risen from the dead, then people who are willing to die for the faith, the prayer of the thief – the thief's prayer on the cross –and Jesus says to him – today you will be with me in Paradise. So, there is that assurance that the martyrs will be saved. If you were going to surgery, you would ask your friends and relatives to pray for you. It is the same thing. If we believe that Christ truly rose from the dead, and he was going to bring people with him – into hereafter death, they are alive. So, rejecting the Saints is the same as rejecting Jesus as the risen Christ.

Lizzie: Having a relic- having someone's body [part]. I'm always happy to go and venerate relics. It's really powerful because there is something really going on here.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

Jeffrey: Our concerns are the Theosis of Jesus Christ -the relationship with Jesus Christ. So, if that is our concern, then the veneration of relics is going to help in bringing us closer to Christ and helping that relationship with Christ. In that sense – yes. But I want to be careful to avoid the cultural, superstitious use of relics – because that could easily happen. Even within our own parish, we talk to people who say things like “put this exorcised salt on your door, or pray this prayer, it’s really powerful. But I always want to ask why do you want me to do this? If the reason is to get closer to Jesus, then yes, I’ll do it. But I want to vehemently reject the concept that I can just get what I want by doing some things and obtaining some powerful artifacts. Because that kind of worship is described in the Old Testament in Kings. Ultimately God does not like that. He does not want to be put inside a box. So, I want this thing so do the thing you do. Now we’re going to war with these philistines so do your thing. God is like, “Who are you talking to? You haven’t been worshipping me. You’re talking to yourself. You don’t have a conversation with me.” So, praying with the Saints and praying with the relics has been very beautiful but I’m always very cautious about using it as a means of fixing a situation. Our needs should always be brought before the Lord.

Lizzie: It should be two-fold. Why do we venerate the Saints – because there’s a God in Heaven and we see examples of people like us and that gives us hope. All of this should be geared toward a relationship with the Lord. So, if you’re venerating relics, it’s to increase our devotion. A friendship with the Saints is ultimately ordered to love Jesus and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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worship God. Like the church you should go to Mass every Sunday to stay in a relationship with God.

Jeffrey: For people who are on a certain part of their faith journey, that's going to be super helpful. The God I'm relying on you to help me. So, I'll do this and God can help me. God can work with that. One thing I think our brothers and sisters in other Christian faiths can criticize us about as a Catholic people, would be our lack of understanding of the difference between the superstitious and real prayer.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, other location?

Jeffrey: At home, daily with family and individually. Sometimes Lizzie or I will go down to the Adoration chapel at St Mary Magdalen church. We have morning prayer. We have prayer in the morning and then actual Mass. But that stuff grows over time. We didn't start like that. I guess morning prayer for us started after the retreat. Like in 2018, that's when I started praying regularly every morning. And I would read the readings for the day. I would do it for fifteen minutes.

Lizzie: We've grown to pray every morning. Right now, we've been doing the "Bible in a Year" so we've been following that. And then we gather as a family to pray. They [the children] are too young to follow along but they are on campus [laughs]. And then at the end of the day we pray an abridged prayer. They are so powerful and they should be used regularly with trust and faith. We're such a sacramental people.

Jeffrey: The physical and spiritual are so closely tied. The eucharist is the biggest testament to this.

Lizzie: And I think the relics bring that to the fore in such a beautiful way and takes us into this amazing relationship with the church triumphant.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer: Which Saint do you pray to most frequently?

Lizzie: You know the reason I have such devotion to Saint Anne is ten years ago – I was raised Catholic, baptized, and went through all the sacraments of the time. And I fell away from the church. In high school and college. And I happened to be very anti religion and very sad. Starting in 2011 it changed. It takes time to shed everything and one of the things I used then was artificial contraception. I was no longer doing anything that made that necessary. I was pretty convinced by the doctors but I had all sorts of pain and they were like, this will help you with the pain. This is more like a medicinal thing so you just stay on it and not be sick. And I was becoming less and less comfortable with that. But I was so ready to give it up but afraid to go off of it. Maybe I wouldn't be able to have children when the time came. There were all these narratives in my head that I needed to stay on this. And I remember it was this time of year, and I ran into the church but was supposed to fill it [the prescription] and I forgot to. So that night I went to bed and I had a dream that I had a child – I had a daughter. And the only thing given to me was this baby and I had to name her. It was up to me to know the name – what it was. So, I'm looking at this baby and it came into my heart that this is Anna.

Lizzie: I woke up that morning and I met this woman with a devotion to Mary Magdalen. She was a new, zealous Catholic So I wake up in the morning and I see it is the Feast of Saint Anna. That's interesting. And I read about her. I found out that she was against birth control. So, I just stopped. I never filled it again. It felt like it was the first time I really had a relationship with a Saint. I was finally at a place where I wanted to be a mother. For all those years, I was very anti motherhood. It felt like it was an invitation from her to trust her: "Just trust me on this. You don't need this. I'm going to take care of this." Fast forward a couple of years I'm being married and had our first daughter. And we did encounter her relic

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

on our honeymoon. We saw her relic in Quebec City, Canada. That the was the first time I think where like through the intercession of Saints I was asked to do something very definite. That was a very spiritual sense.

The Interview with both Jeffrey and Lizzie served as a good reminder about the nature of relics. Although they may be of first-, second-, or third-class nature as assigned by the Catholic Church, they have no power on their own. They do not serve as talismans. It is through the intercession of the Saints – to act on our behalf through Christ that we hope to have our prayers answered or look for guidance on issues. As Jeffrey pointed out, by vehemently rejecting the concept that one can just get what they want by doing some things and obtaining some powerful artifacts, we are instead turning to Christ. Like Jeffrey, I concur that this is where the confusion enters occasionally into one’s Christian faith. The Holy artifacts, or relics – once part of the Saint or once part of a Saint’s life in some way, are not magical objects that can be rubbed like a magic lamp to have one’s wishes granted. They are Holy and they are there to remind the faithful that the Saint, during their lifetime, did all they could to live the life that Jesus requested of them, or to accept similar pain and sufferings as Christ had. Some have died in his name and they are the Martyrs. So it is really through Jesus Christ that we seek help, aid, and assistance for our troubles and concerns, and not the relics of the Saints alone.

### ***Interview 15***

Gretta is a sixty-seven-year-old woman with mixed heritage. She considers herself half Maltese and half Italian. Her father was born and raised in Malta. For Gretta, she was raised in Cold Springs, PA and she has been attending the Roman Catholic church since birth. As she says, “My parents always brought us to church. My mother named me after a teacher probably a domestic thing because my mother only went to school till like fourth

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

grade, but she did a lot of sewing, a lot of stitching. Later in years she was into International Labor Law, the garment union, the sweat shops – that sort of thing.”

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use in prayer.)

Gretta: Saint Francis Xaverii. [Saint Francis Xavier was a Spanish-French missionary and co-founder of the Society of Jesus – a religious society headquartered in Rome. He was one of the first of seven Jesuits that took vows of poverty and chastity. He is also noted for his evangelization in India and was the first Christian missionary to begin work in Japan. See Figure 28] Brother Gary [a local clergy member] opened the back and it has a wax seal [indicating its authenticity – see Figure 29]. I got this from Redemptor Esteemed Nuns. I was having a situation with my son at the time and one of the nuns, Sister Paula said, Gretta – I want to give this to you. So, I’ve been using that to pray for my son Xavier. That’s my only first-class relic. This is my second class and it’s from Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini - and I didn’t realize it, it’s back here [showing the back of the card. See Figure 30] I always used to think this was the relic and thought that’s kind of odd that they put it like that. And that’s something that she actually wore and that’s why that’s a second-class relic [Figure 31]. [Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini is also referred to as Mother Cabrini. Having founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred heart of Jesus in 1880, it became a major institution that supported many Italians that emigrated to the USA from Italy. She is also the first US citizen to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church.]

Greta: And then I have third class relics. I taught at St. Anthony’s high school and one of my students brought this back for me when he went there. He went to Avellino, Italy and brought that back. This one I think my mom had and it’s from Saint Patrick. And then

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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again, 3<sup>rd</sup> class relic I'm sure [Figures 32 and 33]. But I have two people, Patrick, so I always pray for them. St Patrick's intercession. And then this is from Saint Philomena. [Saint Philomena is the Patron Saint of youth – babies and toddlers and other youth. She is also a consecrated virgin – that is – a woman consecrated to a life of virginity or a bride of Christ. Figures 34 and 35] And that's an old Saint. But I listened to a DVD about her life. I've been trying to find a relic of Saint Philomena and I could not, so finally I went online and I wrote to them and explained that I'm trying to get a relic. So, they just sent that to me. And that's a third-class relic.

Interviewer: Gretta then retrieved a small, gray rock from the bag that carried all of the items.

Gretta; And this is not a relic - but this is a stone. When I travel (like on a pilgrimage) I like to bring things back. You're not allowed to bring back anything that is alive. A lot of times I can't find a relic but I picked up this stone. Now here's the thing. It's from when we went to Auschwitz in 2018 and I thought, who knows, maybe Saint Maximilian Kolbe stepped on that or was near it so I picked that up. [Saint Kolbe spent several years as a missionary in Japan beginning in 1930 – having established dialogues with Buddhist monks. Because of failing health, he went back to Poland and was arrested in 1941 by the Gestapo for hiding Jewish people. At Auschwitz Concentration Camp, he volunteered to die in the place of a stranger.] The other place I picked up a rock was when we went to the Greccio, Italy when I went on a pilgrimage for Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare. So, I don't know but I said I'll bring it anyway. It's not heavy but it reminds me of where I was. They used to have them [relics] on altars but I don't know if they still do.

Interviewer: Have you Prayed to Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Gretta; Yes. Not actually praying to them. When I teach, I always teach to be careful in how you use the word “pray.” The definition of prayer is opening our hearts and communicating with God. So, when you talk to people who are not Catholic or children who wouldn’t understand, they may think that they’re God or a substitute for God. I say “no, we ask their prayers for us.” That’s why we say Saint Anthony pray for us. St John the Evangelist, pray for us because we’re asking them to intercede for us.

Interviewer: How often do you pray to seek the intercession of the Saint or Martyr?

Gretta: I pray every day

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Gretta: Other than Saint Francis Xavier, I would say, not in particular. I used to be a lay associate. This is one I was using when I was having a problem with my son at the time [pointing to Saint Francis Xavier].

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

Gretta: I don’t pray with the relics for a specific reason to invoke their intercession. I’ve been blessed in many ways in my life but at least I can say my son is out of the trouble he was in so I’m gonna say Saint Francis had a big part in that. I can’t say that he’s back in the church. I pray for that every day and for all the kids.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, other location?

Gretta: I pray when I go during the week on Fridays. I pray the rosary in the chaplet. We have a walk that we do almost two miles every day. So, I pray then. And the rest of the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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time is mostly in the house. If I'm driving, I pray. I guess if I'm visiting, I'm praying there too. So, I guess I pray everywhere. I'm a praying person – I like to pray for people.

Interviewer: Which Saint do you include most frequently?

Gretta: I have a litany. If I hear a story about a Saint, then they are included in that. There's a lot of Saints I connect with during prayer so I can't really say.

Interviewer: Other religious identity held in past?

Gretta: Always been Roman Catholic. I have many [relics] that my mom had and I just love having them around.

The interview came to a close when Ida [a lady we will meet in the next interview] stopped by and mentioned how in history, they would only bring the relics out during communion because the people were taking them home. Some would do dark stuff – even with the Eucharist, people were taking them home as well for the same thing. I do recall through prior research how those involved with Black Magic, Voodoo, and other dark arts, would include holy artifacts, crosses, and such in ritual, which to the Christian is blasphemy and against God. One just never knows what some other person's intentions are. As Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, parishioners are protective of their faith and protective of those they love. So, it is no wonder that both churches and their parish members are protective of the relics, the Eucharist, and other religious artifacts that are blessed with God's authority. Perhaps those lost in those dark practices should be prayed for as the Saints would have done the same. The light of God's love is there for all, and for those who became lost along the way.

### ***Interview 16***

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Ida is a seventy-year-old female with both Portuguese and Puerto Rican ancestry. Raised in north New Jersey since age three, Ida has been attending the Roman Catholic church her entire life and attended Catholic school – St. Columba’s in Newark, NJ. She moved to Honesdale, PA following her retirement because her husband had a hunting cabin. We met in the basement of St John the Evangelist church directly following morning Mass.

Ida: “So suddenly, this cabin became home [laughs]. A bit different from the city that I lived in – I actually lived in New York City because of my career as a dancer in New York City and traveling abroad and everywhere else and I ended up here in the country [rural]. I always wanted to go back to Puerto Rico of course because my family was still there, so I would visit regularly. When my parents first moved, they didn’t move to New York, they moved to Newark.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use include in prayer.)

Ida: Well, what I actually had happen in my life is that I had actually gone to churches or situations where they had a relic. With that being said, when I first came to this parish [in Honesdale, PA] someone saw the advertisement of the relics of Saint Mary Magdalen on tour. So, he got in touch with the organizers [of the traveling Mary Magdalen exhibit] and they decided to start the relic tour right here with their itinerary so the relics of Saint Mary Magdalen were brought here [Honesdale, PA. This happened in November, 2009]. It became a haven for like everybody. Lots of people came. It was visited by parishes, catholic schools, and it was “like an extravaganza of faith.” So, we had the display here, we had Masses, prayer services and above all, confessions. So, we are talking about Mary Magdalen’s true conversion coming to intercede for all of us.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Ida: There again, I have to say that Lisa [whom I met in a prior interview] in the beginning, when she was just doing her inters, from her intercessions, I was like I want one of Saint Mary Magdalen, and she presented this Faith, Hope and Love and it was Mary Magdalen, touching the feet of Jesus. But when she gave it to me, I said, “this is the conversion!” She said, “this is Love” and consequently, she gave me two other photos, making it all Faith, Hope and Love for me to meditate. Then I had gone down to my mom’s parish. They had the relics of Saint Anthony of Padua and there too is a very interesting thing because there (because of all the Italian’s) they have a true devotion to Saint Anthony of Padua. Every week they have a benediction, a devotion, in the evenings for all those months leading up to the Feast Day. And then they actually have a huge Feast festival outdoors, carnival, which draws in lots and lots of people. And of course, there is the statue with candles. We pray and when that relic was here the people that came to that devotion, all day, in and out, in and out. The next one I went to, down to Jersey again, there was the relics of the Little Thresa and her parents. So, I went to New York City and attended a conference on a weekend and there too, were the relics of Saint Theresa and her parents. So, I went there. It was just amazing to pass by – kind of like when you saw the Pieta at the World’s Fair – way back when. Sometimes, someone would touch whatever rosaries you had to the relics – things like that.

Interviewer: How often do you pray to include the Saints or Martyrs?

Ida: Daily, when I’m down at my mom’s I try to go to devotions on Tuesday nights.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other where a Saint has come through to help you?

Ida: I don’t know if there was anything actual. I think in particular with Saint Mary Magdalen’s relics, it was like seeing a deeper conversion – things you’re not even aware of

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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that you carry from your past sort of resurface up again. The tears of Mary Magdalen – you may say it was this or that, but it was a deeper [meaning]. And I had travelled - sent to theatres that had with little temples. But it wasn't until I actually went on pilgrimages to some of these same places that you realize, or really don't even realize how far away from your faith you have been. And these things are there but we are blind and not seeing them because we were looking at some other God. You know, we were holding some other vocation. Even though it's always there, It just kind of like baptism. And I have to say it was a gift – the dancing was a gift. But at the same time, you forget. It's not the gift, but the giver.

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer while including a relic?

Ida: Yes

Interviewer Note: Ida then showed me some photographs of Saint Mary Magdalen that were taken when the relic tour visited Saint Mary Magdalen's on November 16, 2009 [Figure 36 and 37].

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while including relics in prayer or during the time of need?

Ida: Well, I think it happens with relics and here., in the confession, you know. That overwhelming compunction and sorrow and reconciliation. Phenomena.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, other location?

Ida: Yes, all the time. I do the Liturgy of the Hours [a set of prayers whereby the hours of each day are marked and sanctified with prayer] and chaplets.

Interviewer: Have you ever held any other religious identities?

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Ida: No. I used to do a yoga practice. That's more of a spiritual thing – because I was a dancer so it sort of just followed suit and went into that. It was therapy but that was physical. But can also become spiritual.

Interviewer: Who did you dance with?

Ida: Joffrey Ballet. It used to be in New York City and then they moved to Chicago, so I had a long career with them – twenty-six years.

Interviewer: Which Saint do you include most frequently during prayer?

Ida: Saint Beatrice of Portugal “She who makes others happy.” She formed the order of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady – Our Lady of Spain [which became recognized in 1511 as a legitimate Catholic entity]. She was a Portuguese noblewoman. So, I think she wears the blue scapula as opposed to the brown scapula. Her Feast Day is September 1 of the Franciscan Order. She's the patron Saint of prisoners. Remember I mentioned that Saint Agnes was my confirmation name? So today, there is an opening verse today about Saint Agnes. Saint Agnes is a martyr.

Interviewer: Ida then wanted to show me relics and other artifacts she brought along with her for the interview which I promptly photographed with her permission. It was a beautiful day and the thoughts of knowing how the relics of Saint Mary Magdalen were at one time at the same location as I standing in was humbling. I still see Ida occasionally at Mass if I attend the early morning Mass.

### ***Interview 17***

Carla, I found to be a fascinating parishioner from Saint Mary Magdalen's church located in Honesdale, PA. She is fifty-three years of age and was raised in Philadelphia, and moved to Newfoundland, PA. Then she moved again to Ohio, but eventually settled back in

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Honesdale, PA. She had regularly attended church since birth, but left the church at age nineteen, and returned at age 34. She is also an artist.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use in prayer.)

Carla: St Bernadette First-Class relic. It was my mother's. My mother had a great devotion to Saint Bernadette. And a priest who had passed away, left it to my mother. [After the interview, I examined the relic under 10X magnification and it appears to contain tiny bone fragments. See Figures 38 and 39. Saint Bernadette is best known for the Marian visions she had in cave-grotto in Massabielle, France. Since her passing in 182, her body remains incorrupt.]

Carla: I don't know if it's part of her blood, but it is first class. It's from her body somewhere. It used to have a paper with it. When the priest family gave it [the relic] to my mother, they didn't give her the paperwork. My mother is now in a nursing home. My mother has dementia. For the past five years I've been taking care of her.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to include Saints or Martyrs for Assistance?

Carla: Yes

Interviewer: How often do you pray to include the Saint or Martyr?

Carla: Daily. For me, it sits on the altar. And it's just a part of my altar. It's more like a book shelf but it has all religious stuff on it that I use in prayer.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Carla: Yes, many times. Just four years ago, I tried to commit suicide. And, people don't get it; they say, "How can you have such a strong faith to God and do that?" It's

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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chemical – it's something else. It's hard for people to understand how you could have such a strong faith, and I do indeed have a faith, but when you're in that much pain, I have no reason. My depression is something I have dealt with for my entire life. I have a wonderful husband. My family life is horrible but I've been married for 26 years. And I have three wonderful children. My husband in my partner. He's always been there. He has always been there. So, people will think, why is it okay to kill yourself when you have all this?" And it's because of the love I have for them and the love they have for me, that I didn't want to hurt them. I didn't want them to have to worry about Mom.

Carla: The one Saint I do pray to a lot is Saint Rita because Saint Rita is the Patron Saint of impossible causes. [Saint Rita was a widow and Augustinian nun. She died in 1457. Following the death of her husband, she became a nun and often engaged in the mortification of the flesh, to repent for her sins and to share the passion of Jesus Christ. She is often portrayed with a bleeding gash on her head.]

Another is St Jude. There's a few of them that are patron saints to impossible causes but I suffered with that my entire life, but I've always prayed to her – Saint Rita. Then I started the Devine Mercy. It's always there, it's in my house. That's how I got my husband to pray to rosary – because the Devine Mercy is shorter. So, he would pray that first, then I got him to pray the rosary.

Carla continued: My mother was always (she converted to Catholicism when she was older), went to daily Mass, she prayed all the time and she had a horrible life. But was always devoted to God. And when I left the church, you know - you get involved, go to college, so I walked away. My children were baptized in the Lutheran Church. My husband and I were married in a Lutheran Church because I was not going to Mass. My son, he was

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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probably about age two at the time, he's very, very young. He kept saying that he saw angels. He'd say, "Momma, there's angels in my room again." That's the one who's now in the seminary, studying to be a priest. I used to go, Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. So, my mother asked to go to this place in New York – Rose Mystica. There was a lady who was talking about angels there. So, I told Mother, we'll take him, yeah, yeah, yeah. They had relics there. Don't know who the relics were. And don't know what they were. You go up and touch them. So, we went and they had three relics out. You can come up and touch them. Of course, my son is little so I said c'mon, let's go. At the time, with all these people there, they must believe in angels. When I went, they put the relic (wish to this day I knew who it was) but he put it on my heart and he said, "Mary said...you need to read the bible." Now how would he know that I don't read the bible? Do you know what I mean? It freaked me out. Because there's no way in this church full of people, with Mass, they would know I didn't read the bible. And I never did – ever. I went to a Catholic school and I never read the bible. So, then I started reading the bible.

Carla: There's another place that's in Ohio. I forget what the name of the place is. But anyway, they say Mary is appearing there. It's in Elysburg, OH. Visions of Mary are occurring here. So, I went there. Another trip of my mother's – alright I'll go. So, I took all the old people out there in a minivan for a couple of days with my son. My mother drove me all over the place with him because he wanted to go to all these places. So, I took him out there and my mom and Wayne Weible is there who wrote the book on Medjugorje - he's a Lutheran. I read the book of Medjugorje and the story really touched me and wanted to tell him his book is really good. I'm not the type of person who does that. I'm the type of person who stands in the background. If he's still there in the end, I'll go say hi. But I don't wait in line. I was gonna walk away and all of a sudden, the line was gone. Somebody else

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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walked in and they went over to see who this person was. A priest or somebody else they know. I didn't know who the guy was. My mother said, go, go. I'll take your picture with him. So, I walked up to him and I said I just wanted to tell you that your book really touched me.

Carla: Because we grow up thinking that God only talks to people who God touches, are religious, who pray, but he touched you and touched your life and you're not even Catholic. He was Lutheran. He became Catholic later. And I really want to tell you that really was important to me and it really touched my life – and made me think that, okay, maybe he is out there. And I started to walk away and I had been reading the Bible now since I saw that guy. I felt maybe I should just open it up and read anywhere. So, after I talked to him, I said, he really made me understand that God was there. So, I started to walk away and he ran after me and he stopped me and he said, “Because you answered her – you did what she asked you to do - you read the bible” I was totally freaked out after that point. That was pretty much was my turning point of okay, I'll do whatever it is you want me to do.

Carla: I have an absolute love of the Saints. Have you ever heard of the Treasures of the Church? It was here. It was in East Stroudsburg, two years ago. And I got to see the relics. And I brought these – these are what I make. They're made with different kinds of wood. I wood burned them and I cut out the pieces and put them together like walnut, pine, ash – almost like a mosaic. When I stopped working and after all this, I went to Ohio and Wayne Weible said to me [what he said] So I'm thinking, maybe there's something real here. Maybe it's just not for people who go to church. Now I'm that person. My perception then was different. Maybe's there's something to this. I took my son to see Padre Pio's cloth, his hand glove in Barto, PA. They allowed him to put his hand on the glass. By this time, he was

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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probably about twelve or so. I could tell by the look of his face because his face turned white, I knew something had happened. So, he comes back down and sits down. What happened I said: what was that look? He said, “Mom, his hand wrapped around mine”. And it was in glass and you couldn’t go through it. When it comes through somebody you know, I just knew it was okay. He would be alright. Then my kid said I don’t want to go through the priesthood, I want to have a family. I said, you’re having experiences people don’t normally have, and not just once, or twice. He has them over again and many different places.

Carla: We went to St George’s Antiochian Orthodox church to see the Crying Mary. When my mother and I went there to that, we took two rosaries. One was for me and one was for my son. We just wanted to put them near the picture. The priest brought the picture over. I couldn’t get to it and I told my mom to just put the rosaries on the picture. And my mother, as she was coming closer to the picture, it started dripping. Her hand was like full of oil with these rosaries.

Carla: Another incident where we’re not waiting in line and it’s the standing Christ and it drips water from its knee. Why it’s knee I don’t know. I went to Medjugorje and my husband said no I don’t want to go. So, I went myself. I would get up at 4:00 in the morning and walk up where our Lady appeared on the hill and I would pray the rosary and come back down. Nobody was up there. Like an idiot, I never thought about it. But I woke up every morning at 4:00 in the morning and thought, what am I going to do? Breakfast isn’t until 8:00. Somebody said to me, do you know where the Jesus is, the risen Jesus statue? Well, I’ve been wandering around but didn’t see it. They said, ‘If you go there, you just pray about what it is you want. Or what it is that you’re praying about. And you wipe the tears with a cloth and place it in a plastic bag.’ Even though I had like all of this stuff happen, I don’t

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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really look for it. It just kind of happens. And I think that's what draws me to all of this so much. It's that you don't have to believe. It just happens.

Carla: So anyway, I went to the risen statue one morning. Here was a line, but it wasn't too long. And this other lady is with me and she really wanted to go. She came down with me from the hotel and said, okay, we'll wait in line. These people are going up there and praying. There's nothing happening. Nothing coming out of the knee or something. It's my turn, I get up there and there's a young man here in our parish here who had an aneurism. Very young like 15 or 16. So I prayed for him. Then I prayed for my sons and daughter, especially for my son Will. And I asked, "Is this what you want for him? Do you want him to be a priest or do you want him to have a family?" And I used to ask all the time. What do you want for my son because I don't want to be that person that says "I think you should be a priest." So, I asked and I prayed and said, "Do you want Will to be a priest?" And water started pouring out of the knee. I'm just praying and I go to walk away and the old lady started saying, "Honey, honey!" They're giving me tissues and taking it off the statue. And I'm like, what am I going to do with this? I prayed, [they interpreted it a little bit different] than I did. I knew what he was talking about. I knew what I had asked him. The young man has recovered. He's doing really, really well. I pray for him; I pray for my son. And everything kind of worked out. I don't look for it. I believe. But I don't look for it because if he wants you to know it, he'll let you know.

Carla: When I tried to commit suicide, after that, my husband was really, really worried. My husband was really upset because that was a second time. In like over the course of a year. Nothing bad happened. My depression just really was horrible. I went to the hospital, the psychological hospital. I was there for 10 days, they put me on medicine and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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came back. And it's a fight to come back. It's a fight to get over it. And you have to change the way you think. And at one point, I was in here praying [pointing to St Mary Magdalen Church]. I was thinking that I really just need to die. I can't do this any longer. And I felt in my heart that God said, I saved you twice, I'm not saving you again. It was enough to scare the crap out of me. Oh... You stopped it. The absolute reality of okay – I should have died. I should have died. But you saved me. But it was an absolutely, “not another time – not again.” And it was just the push I needed. I went through three years of counseling. You have to change the way you think. It's a lot of work to be able to do that. But that was just enough to push me in that direction. And I have suffered with it my entire life. Now, that's where I go. I go to chapel. That's where he is. When I'm in there, I'm at peace. Nothing bothers me. Nothing phases me. I just talk to him. Sometimes I pray.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your religion – the religion that you practice is more private or is there a need to be with others when you engage in it?

Carla: Mine is more private. It's very private. And talking to you – I asked God three times, “If you want me to do this, to talk to this guy, you have to answer. And I prayed that night. And then you called the next day – so that was my answer. Okay...I got it. With my background, with having suffered depression, my entire life. I do stupid things all the time. But for someone to say you're crazy to me, is horrible. That's the worst thing you could possibly call me. Because I know I'm not crazy...it's just depression. So, of all things I don't tell people because when it comes from somebody that has depression, they just turn away.

Carla: The way the world teaches you is everything is supposed to be good or if you have this, you're good. “If you pray enough, you're good.” No, it doesn't mean your good.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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It means your praying and thanking God for what you have, even if you don't know what it is or don't appreciate it. Because most of the time we don't know what graces he's given us as we're going through it. So, I'm kind of like that person that I know that there is a spiritual world – I know there is more beyond here. I said to my daughter, “You watch those ghost shows, and you believe there's ghosts. You believe in relics. You believe that a human person should be honored and respected, and cared about.” “That's different Mom, it's not like that!” she said. I said, “No, there's one difference between believing in ghost and evil and stuff. She started reading Tarot cards which totally freaked me out. I said, “You believe that?” “Yeah”, she said. I said, “That's more evil because that's where the demons are.” And she knows that. She knows that logically. She's very, very intelligent. You believe in that, why do not believe there is good? She chooses not to answer. She just diverts the conversation or changes it. But I know it's still there, and still in her mind. She had lived with us for all these years and weird things have happened to us for a long time. I know she knows, but when you're in a state of sin, it's harder to come back than it is to say you just don't believe. It's harder for my daughter to say to me now, what I'm doing is wrong, than it is to say okay I just don't believe it. And I told her that she has to get to that point where she realizes that she can come back, and I think that's the problem people have.

Carla: I like churches and I like when people out there and pray together and that it's important for the soul, and the Eucharist is most important. But when people see that – the average ordinary person see that, do they see God? No, they see people that believe in God is like (what my daughter says) a cult, they see that. What they don't see are the broken people. What they don't see is the reality is that those people in those pews are just as bad and just as broken. Going to church and praying doesn't make you holy. It makes you grow and it helps you grow. But it doesn't make you holy – only he does. But it turns people off, and it makes

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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them go away. That's why I make this. I make pictures of Saints. I sell them for the church. One year I did it for here [St Mary Magdalen's Church] and all the money went here. And I did it for my son in the seminary and all the money went there. People will stop and say, "What is that?" They will have no idea what it is.

Carla: I tell my daughter all the time, I'm praying for you, your grandmother is praying for you. I'm asking you to tell God "Please give me the Grace that my family is praying for." My father had not gone to church for years and years. He was dying of cancer. He was a very bad alcoholic and a very abusive alcoholic – very mean. So, his entire life was that way. He dies when he was 68, and he had sclerosis of the liver. When he was dying, my mother kept saying, "Let me get a priest. He was Catholic. But he won't talk to a priest. And then all of a sudden, he said, okay. So, there was a wonderful priest who talked to my father. He gave him last rites. He heard his confession. And my mother and I prayed the divine mercy next to him for hours and hours because we didn't know when he was going to die. My father died at 3 am, just as my mother finished the Divine Mercy. But I know where he is. I know that's he's okay. It doesn't matter how far they walk; it doesn't matter how long they walk away; He is always there to bring them back.

Carla: My relic of St Paraguay is at my father-in-law's house. My father-in-law is a Mason, he is Lutheran, He doesn't believe there is anything wrong with being a Mason at all. Hates the Catholic Church. Was Catholic. But hates the Catholic Church. But his grandson is in a seminary. They have discussion but Will is very good and very polite in how he responds.

Interviewer: There's seems to be, in general, a whole bias or prejudice against the Masons and I'm not sure why.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Carla: Basically, what the Masons do is they believe that there should be one God, just like the One World Order.

Interviewer: But there is just one God - there are no other Gods before him.

Carla: Right, but in their mind, Buddhist is okay, Islam is okay – it's all the same. No, it's not all the same. You can't go to the Lutheran church and get Jesus. And leaving your soul here. This is where he is [nodding to St Mary Magdalen's church.] You can go somewhere else and pray. But anyway, my father-in-law hates the Catholic church. He came down with cancer. And my mother gave him Saint Peregrine [Saint Perigrine Laziosi – a fourteenth century and a patron Saint of cancer] relic. He's the Patron Saint of cancer. Because it came from my mother, and it was a suggestion from his daughter-in-law's mother, he just can't say no. He took it. He had skin cancer at the time. Not bad. They cut it out. He was okay. Everything was fine. Then he ended up with cancer in the spine. It was a different cancer. All gone, all healed. Had lung cancer – never smoked. Went through Chemo radiation again. Ended up with prostate cancer. They were so freaked out at the hospital because they are three different types of cancer. They sent it away because they don't understand how he keeps getting cancer. He was in his 70's when it all started. He's all cleared up. I went in their house, and I look at my mother and father in-law's bedroom on the shelf it's the Saint Peregrine relic.

Carla: I think that's what attract me so much to relics. Saints don't care who you are, they don't care what you believe or don't believe. It will heal people no matter what religion you are. If you think about it, from the beginning of time, people honored their dead. We still honor our dead. They put them in cemeteries or in crematoriums and on a shelf. But we still honor the dead. So why would we not honor the dead Saints? They were given a grace by God and accepted it. So, God lives within them. As he lives in each of us and that's how I

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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look at it. And I think that's why the dead should always be honored because he is in them. They are part of God. So, for me to have a relic of a Saint, it doesn't change the fact that it was part of God and is still there.

The interview had eventually drifted off into discussion of the objects Carla was making for other people. I had the opportunity to photograph the items she brought with her to the interview and to thank her for telling me her very personal story. She appeared by light and happy after we departed from the porch of Saint Mary Magdalen Church.

Interesting enough, during the interview process that I was engaged with, I received an email from a Catholic monk whom the parishioners refer to as Brother Gary. I had requested to interview him in person, but Brother Gary preferred to send a response by email to my request. Here below is his response.

I am 66 years old, am Irish American, raised in New York. I currently live on Long Island I am Roman Catholic and attend daily mass.

I have deep devotion to the communion of saints as a matter of Faith and have been attached to the physicality of relics. I have devotion to a number of saints but have strong devotion to Saint Anthony and Saint Francis. I have first class relics of both. I take comfort in having these relics in my room and feel "the great company of witnesses "in my life.

I also became concerned by the number of eBay dealers from the Netherlands and Belgium who had access to closed convents and placed the relics for sale. When I would have some extra money, I tried to win them to remove them from possible profanation.

Relics are not magic talismans, yet there is a strong connection to a Saint when relics are available and can and do aid prayer to God through the intercession of someone believed to be in heaven. There is biblical precedent where even the shadow cast by the apostles could induce healing. The apostles touched cloth and affected a healing.

Roman Catholicism is a very tactile, physical and sensual religion where the 5 senses are employed to sense God. Protestants generally stress hearing as the primary sense to get to God. Catholics use all 5 senses hence relics are one of those ways sight and tactile grittiness are ways to get closer to God.

*Hope this helps*

*Brother Gary*

***Interview 18***

Christy is a sixty-one-year-old woman who was raised in Long Island, NY (Smithtown in Suffolk County, NY) but now resides in Honesdale, PA. We met on the front porch of her home in Honesdale, PA.

Interviewer: What age were you when began regularly attending Church?

Christy: There was a gap. I went to the most Catholic Lutheran church there was. The pastor who baptized me said at the end of it, “And bless the Holy Father in Rome.” That was from infancy to the age of twelve. Then I went to the Catholic church - I started back when I was forty-three.

Interviewer: Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I use in prayer.)

Christy: Do I know Kateri! I almost died from the small pox vaccine. So, I have a good devotion to her and my cousins live up in Mohawk Valley. I absolutely love her! I got an altar in my bedroom. I’ve got third class relics - Padre Pia, Saint Anthony, and I have blessed holy cards from St Tikhon’s with myrrh. In fact, I had a miracle – at St Tikhon’s. Father Surgis was like WHAT? [he was surprised]. The myrrh streaming ikons.

Christy: They had this one particular icon. It was an icon of Our Lady. It’s from Hawaii [*thy Holy Icon, O Lady Theotokos, blessed myrrh has flowed abundantly*]. And it’s a myrrh streaming icon. I was singing with St Tikhon’s from September of 2011 and this was in 2012, Memorial Day weekend - because they had the icon there. I was having problems going up and down the stairs. I was getting real bad heart palpitations and getting winded. I couldn’t breathe. And so, I’m standing in line for Bishop Michael to anoint us with the myrrh

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

from the icon. And it was funny because he was saying everybody's name as they came up. And all of a sudden, I get up because I'm not well and I say, "Momma, you are the divine nurse, you have to do something. There's something going on with my heart, I can't do anything about this. I have no insurance right now; I have no doctor you have to handle this." And I get up and Bishop Michael literally looks at me and goes "Oh hand maid of the Lord" and anoints me and I feel this warm rush go right through me. And I had it happen a couple of months earlier, the same thing happened when he anointed me on the Feast of Saint Nicholas. But so, I had this sensation of this warm rush going through my body and said to one of my friends, I'll be right back. Stay here. And I went inside St Tikhon's. I walk in, and to test it, I ran up and down the stairs three times and I was like, "Thanks Mom!" And I literally from that point on, have had no issues going up and down stairs, losing my breath or any. That was one episode.

Name of Saint or Martyr associated with relic(s)?

Christy: I actually have the Holy card of that icon that I had the healing from. And then I have also relics from the miraculous icon, Saint Anne which is over at St. Tikhon's. I've got a bunch of stuff...oh my God. Now that I'm thinking about it, I have myrrh that comes from St George's Orthodox Church in Taylor, PA. It's on Keyser Avenue. There's a myrrh streaming icon that's at St George's. With that myrrh streaming icon, my friend, MaryAnn from St Tikhon's, she had had colon cancer surgery. She wasn't allowed to drive so I was driving her around to do stuff. We were over at St Tikhon's and Father Surgis had said, listen...there's an icon, that just started streaming myrrh. Nobody knows about it yet. But if you wanna go over there, [St George's], I'll make a call. And you can be blessed with the myrrh from the icon. So, she looks at me and said, "oh, we're going." So, Maryann and I

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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were one of the first ones that actually got blessed from the myrrh from that icon. And I have no doubt it helped me dramatically with all of the struggles that I've been going through.

Christy: How do I describe this? With my kids, one of my sons has left Jehovah's Witnesses. The other two are still in. But I think it's getting a little thin because of them breaking the rules - because they're not supposed to talk to me. And they're starting to talk to me. They respond to my texts. My older son, Sean, will answer the phone so this is good. It's breaking the control. So, I go over a lot of times (16:57) to St George's specifically to pray for my sons. One down, two to go. So, it's getting there. The other thing is at one point when I was still a Jehovah's Witness, we lived with my in-laws who are charismatic Catholics. It was interesting! I got along with my mother-in-law because we both appreciated the bible. And my mother-in-law was never like a controller. My mother's a socio-path. But my mother-in-law was always the sweetest thing on the planet. We lived with them for two and a half years. Everybody was like "you're living with Catholics? I said, My God!" What's the problem? She's a good grandmother. I have no problems with her. She shops for the kids, takes them to McDonald's, to swimming in the pool together. I cook half the week; she cooks half the week. It works out fine." It was funny because my mother-in-law had attached to the curtain rods, over the bed, green scapulars. And my ex-husband, who had left the Catholic church, and told off the Monsignor when he was six years old, it had come back to bite him in the butt big time. So, I said to him, "What is this stuff?" "Oh, that's my mother's stupid stuff. They're green scapulars. They're supposed to be for conversions. It's not gonna work" he said. So, I was sleeping for two and a half years underneath this scapular.

Christy: The funny part was when I became Catholic, and went to get my annulment, I happened to call down to the church. My mother in-law was terrified to fill out the forms

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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for the annulment because technically under old Catholic law, my ex-husband wasn't allowed to withdraw his membership from the Catholic Church. It wasn't until after '83. We got married in '79. So that's the law that applied at that time. She was terrified of the repercussions from her son. She knew he would blow a gasket at her. And at that point, his father had died and she was by herself. So, the Monsignor, whom my ex-husband told off, called me and said, well I just want you to know that I just had a talk with Josephine. I tried to talk some sense into her but she wouldn't fill out the form but if you need anything, let me know. So, I tried to fill out the forms and it was a simple form because we got married in a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall.

Christy: The way things went; the tribunal sent me back the paperwork because I couldn't get anybody else to fill out the paperwork. None on my side of the family was going to do it because they're all JW's. Finally, I'm about to go on vacation and Monsignor Manley had done some digging and he found Brendan's confirmation paperwork and his baptism. That was one of the issues – getting his paperwork – because he was actually born in Dublin, Ireland. So, the Monsignor calls back and says, "If anyone deserves an annulment, you do!" He wrote up a testimonial for me and sent it up to the tribunal. And Joe Foxx from the Diocese calls me the day before Christmas eve [Dec 23] and asks, "Do you still have those papers that I sent you back?" I said "Yes, they're in my secretary. He goes, "Good, I need them, we just got Monsignor's testimony and all we have to do is sign off on it." I was a bad girl – I speeded. I got down to the diocese, ran my butt upstairs and handed them in. My lawyer said, "All we need then is for one of the Monsignors to sign off on this, and I'll have it in the mailbox this afternoon." I got my annulment on Christmas Eve! Needless to say, the scapular worked! [laughs].

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Christy: Here's another thing on the power of the green scapular. When my son bought his first car, we bought it off a Catholic. I actually took a green scapular and put it inside of his car. And the person that he bought it from - my friend - she and I both agreed that if he asked where this come from, we would say he bought the car from a Catholic, what do you expect? So sure enough, he's the one that left the JW's [Jehovah Witnesses] first. Never doubt the green scapular.

Interviewer: How often do you pray to include the Saint or Martyr?

Christy: Every day. I go to Mass every day.

Interviewer: Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Christy: Yes, I would say for graces for family and friends.

Interviewer: Have your concerns been answered through prayer which could be associated with a relic?

Christy: Yes

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the Saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

Christy: I had had those kinds of experiences but they were during prayer, but not connected to relics. [They were connected with supernatural activity.] Definitely. It's something, It's extraordinary. I've spoken to my spiritual director about it but it's not something I'd like to make public at this point. That's probably the best way to put it. But I had had numerous dreams as far as direction to keep praying for certain people.

Christy: Do you know what a Saint Rita rose is? [Rita of Cascia, was an Italian widow and Augustinian nun. The roman Catholic church venerated her in 1900.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Her body remains incorrupt]. My old boyfriend, Mike, Unfortunately, he foolishly let a woman to blackmail him and that was the cause of our separation – because she had power over his ability to practice medicine. She worked at the hospital. Literally, her title at the hospital was [name omitted] That’s how bad she is. But I was constantly praying for him. And one of the things I did, was a Novena to Saint Rita. So, I did the Novena. Well on his birthday, I went out to put out some compost in the backyard of the house I used to live at, two blocks away. Went out, and I had a rose bush up the side of my back porch. And it only blooms, end of May, beginning of June. His birthday is September 25<sup>th</sup>. And that’s what was on the bush. When I walked out on the porch. That is called a Saint Rita’s Rose – to say – the prayer was answered. A Saint Rita’s rose is a rose that blooms out of season. I started praying to her because I had gone down to the Saint Rita’s shrine in Philadelphia. That’s when I started praying to her – for him – the Saint of impossible causes.

Interviewer: Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, other location?

Christy: Driving – I call it my prayer box [laughs – states how she prays most of the rosary or a Novena.] I very rarely listen to my radio.

Interviewer: Which Saint do you include in prayer most frequently?

Christy: Our Lady, Mary. (29:45). Then comes Saint Joseph.

Interviewer: Any other religious identity held in past?

Christy: Jehovah’s Witness and that reminds me. The two most likely times for a woman in a domestic violence situation to die is when she initially leaves, and when the guy gets the divorce papers. Christy went on to describe how her Ex held up the divorce as long as he could. By the end of it all, the two lawyers got called into the judge’s chamber and asked them why isn’t this done? It’s not us, it’s not her, its him -he’s the nut. “Mike and I had made arrangements back in November for us to go down to Florida because his family

## Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles

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wanted to meet me. I talked to them on the phone for years. He said let's go down there for two weeks, around Valentine's Day. Literally on the Tuesday before we were supposed to fly to Florida, my lawyer calls me up who's now the judge: "You're not going to believe this -we got him to sign" he said. Mike and I are flying out of Newark on Friday. I ask, "Can you call Lee (his lawyer) and ask him if he can hold up the papers until Mike and I are on the plane and out of here, because you know what a risk this is?" She calls back and says Lee says I'll give her whatever she wants.

Christy: How God actually got me into the church was when I was at the time, working for an interior decorator. She had asked me to make drapes for St John's rectory. And that's how I was sneaking into the church – I Didn't want the Jehovah's Witnesses boys knowing. I would say it's a local job. I got to go take measurements. I would do that on Sunday. I would go to the back of the Church. I was having panic attacks because I was still semi conditioned from them that Jehovah was going to kill me. I literally fell right back into all the prayers and it was just like when I was a little kid. After a while of me asking questions of friends who were Catholic, and they said I need to sit down with Father Boyler. So, I called them and went down and had my copy of "Christ Among Us" and slapped it down on his desk (all highlighted, underlined, noted, etc.). He flipped through it. He said, "I've seen you," and I said "Yes, I'm the woman who sits in the back and makes the drapes."

After Mass on Sunday, I go down downstairs – we have a class down there. I go down there and everyone is chatting. One guy looks familiar. He works on my Suzuki. That was in early January. [During the discussions, Christy was identifying all the words and quotes from the bible.]

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Interviewer Note: Jehovah Witnesses that stopped by her customers home she would have a discussion with.

Christy: Two guys that came to my customer's door with it. We're living in such dangerous times, what do you think is in store for us? So, I opened up to that section, 2 Timothy 1-5, which is one of their favorites. Ever study psychology or history? It's interesting because the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write out the characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder. If you look at history, every society has collapsed when the society becomes primarily narcissistic. One of the guys was the son of an elder who my mother had sent to my son. As soon as he turned 18, my mother called this elder and guilt tripped my son back into it. Now his son was in front of me. So, I gave his son a load of truth. The elder, the dad, comes around the house and sees me and says Debbie, you know better. I said "What, to speak the truth? Have a nice day." But he gave my sons lies. My son left his lies. His son: God is gonna work on the truth that I gave him. All you gotta do is plant those questions like peas under the mattress.

Christy: My son comes home and says I can't believe you Catholics say Jesus is God. I opened my bible to Luke and show how Jesus says your sins are forgiven. The Pharisees says only God can forgive sins. Jesus did not correct the Pharisees. So, I see Eric, you agree with the Pharisees. When you leave the JW they want to cancel you out like cancel culture – completely invalidate you. They would love for me to leave this area. The internet is starting to show the hypocrisies. Sexual assault issues (court cases have to be resolved). The minors are being assaulted. It was my sons' friends who were being assaulted. He saw me going through what I had – being rebellious. One of their governing body members used to be the circuit overseer for this area.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Christy had also mentioned her devotion to the Weeping Madonna icon which she (as well as others of the faith) refers to as The Crying Mary. However, she had not gone into detail about the miraculous image.

Interviewer Note: The main theme I find from this interview appears to come mainly from the conversion experiences described by Christy through the green scapular. The green scapular, while not a holy relic per se, is really an article of devotion, typically worn around the neck of the believer. Some have called it a religious metal in cloth. It is usually made of wool and is representative of a monk's clothing or the large overgarment which a monk had worn to protect his tunic during the working hours of the day. They are available in several colors and the green scapular represents conversion. With the stories we hear expressed by Christy, there obviously is a confirmation or at least a correlation to the mystery of conversion that she expressed. In addition, we have read of further confirmation of the healing powers of the myrrh streaming icon that Christy came into contact with, and instantly enabled her to run repeatedly up and down a flight of church stairs.

### ***Interview 19***

On August 28, I had the pleasure to meet with Father Mark at St Michael's Eastern Orthodox Church in Jermyn, PA. He is sixty-nine years of age and moved from Poland to the US at age three. He is of Russian-Ukrainian descent.

Interviewer Note: It was a quick ride to Jermyn, PA, having only spent twenty minutes on the road between Honesdale and my destination. Jermyn is a beautiful little community and the people are just personable to meet and enjoyable to be around. Now having walked through my fourth Eastern Orthodox church, I felt at home and welcome again as I have had at my home church. Following the two-hour long Divine Liturgy,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Father Mark sat down with me in the first pew of the church and began speaking about the Son of man.

Fr Mark: So, sons of Man can become Sons of God. So, when we say relic, the living relic, the resurrected relic, is our lord and savior, Jesus Christ. He took humanity, that was lost, and he became the new Adam. He died on the cross for our salvation. So, we base our faith in the Orthodox Church on the Nicaean Creed which has been put together by the Eastern Church fathers in Nicaea – 325 and 381 in Constantinople. And in there, you might want to include parts of the Creed where it says he became man of us and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. In history, Pontius Pilate is forever remembered and, in every liturgy, he's become famous because Christ came into history. He was Anthropos – what we call the Divine Man. The Divine Anthropos – the God Man. And the liturgy in the Eastern Orthodox church is celebrated on the holy altar. And inside the Holy Altar are the relics of Saints that have been martyred. The cloth that's opened, [Antimin] is also the relics sewn into the Antimin. And so, the liturgy cannot be celebrated just anywhere. It has to be celebrated on a sacred altar, consecrated for a particular church in place and time and served over the relics of a Saint [the relics in the altar].

Fr Mark: In the early church, the liturgy was celebrated in the catacombs over the relics of Saints. And so, the church here is adorned with the lives of Saints – Saint Barbara [for example]. Whenever you see an icon with a crown, it's a sign of martyrdom. So, Saint Barbara over there [pointing to the icon located on the Prothesis] was martyred. Martyr in Greek means witness, so she's a witness for us. Saint Stephen [pointing now to the opposite side of the altar – located on the Diaconicon] who was stoned to death [of which Paul was witness to] he was martyred.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Fr Mark: So, we pray for the intercession of the Saints. It's part of a pious tradition that we pray for one another. Eternal life is only a breath away. What separates us from earth and heaven is very thin. And so, in the incarnation of Christ we commemorate also his death, resurrection, accession into heaven and his second coming. In the Orthodox Church, we celebrate Saints that we remember, a martyr in the church, and his companions. So, we remember the relics of Saints every Sunday. The Orthodox church is an historical church. It's not just scripture. Because the Orthodox Church put together the canon and scripture. It didn't come from somewhere; it was put together by the Eastern fathers. So, in the Orthodox Church, we have scripture and holy tradition equal. Before written scripture, there was holy tradition. Does that mean the people did not know scripture? Of course, they did. They memorized it. And tradition means, that which is passed down. In Greek. So, it's holy tradition, like Divine Liturgy that we have. It's the liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom and dates back to the fourth century – not changed. So, you witnessed something sacred today dating back to the fourth century. We all, in this country, like to change. And I think, what about us changing? That's an interesting quote – Father John the pastor at St Michael's says, “what about us changing and adopting our life?”

Fr Mark: The Eastern and the Western Church were one church until the schism in 1054. We've still been united longer than we've been separated but it's coming close. We have Peter who founded the church in Rome. But Andrew was the first called – the church in Greece. I remember when we have, during eastern and western unity week the bishop of Scranton hosts the eastern church. We have a nice meal. He always calls us the Big brother because Andrew is associated with the Eastern Orthodox church founding the church of Greece. So welcome to the Big Brother! Don't look upon anthropology as the study of man.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Christ came into the world as man. So, it all fits. The church is the church in history. Christ is concerned about man.

Interviewer Note: Father Mark then showed me some of the relics located to the left of the altar, such as Saint Herman of Alaska, Saint Innocent Bishop of Irkutsk, Saint Moses of the Kiev near Caves, Saint Josaphat Kuntsevych, Saint Moses of the Ukraine, Saint Maxim Sandovich – one of Father Mark’s favorites as he was from the Carpathian Mountains.

Father Mark: Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev – the first Metropolitan to be martyred during the Bolshevik Revolution. It was 1917. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy like I did and Bolsheviks came into the church and took him by force, then took him in a car and pushed him against a wall. He said, “You don’t have to push me, I go freely – I know what you’re going to do.” And they shot him to death. The same thing with Saint Maxim Sandovich – he was shot to death. There were many more.

Interviewer Note: Father then decided we should go to his office in the rectory across from the church. As we were walking to the entranceway, Father Mark continued on explaining some of the nuances of the Eastern Orthodox church.

Father Mark: In the Eastern Church, we follow the tradition where the priests have the option to be married and a majority of them were married. It’s part of our tradition. We have celibacy, but it’s not a forced celibacy.

Interviewer Note: We chatted informally about the difference between the Divine Liturgy and the Roman Catholic Mass, and Holy Synod.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Father Mark: It's [the divine liturgy] different from the western church. Everything is sung. The Holy Synod of Bishops is in Long Island. The Holy Synod means the gathering of the bishops when they gather together at Syosset, Long Island.

Interviewer Note: We then locked up the church and walked across the street to his office. Upon entering the office, it brought back memories of St Aloysius church where I would help Monsignor Steffens back in the 1970's occasionally sorting mail, putting stamps on letters and correspondence, assist in sorting and tracking collection envelopes, and performing other general office tasks when I was fifteen, sixteen and even seventeen years of age. Walking into the rectory of St Michael's brought all those memories back to memory which I haven't thought about in over forty years now seems like a hundred years ago. As we were entering, he had told me how he received his doctoral in 1996, back in Moscow.

Fr Mark: In Poland, the second major faith is the Russian Orthodox church – first Roman Catholic church, then Russian Orthodox church.

Interviewer: Was there ever a cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Fr Mark: They come to me all the time. Every time the phone rings, it's always concerning because it's usually an illness, some family issue and whatever it may be – what I try to do is find out what the problem is. When it's a problem that can be handled through prayer, I meet them at their home and pray about it. When it's something serious – an illness, we pray for the intercession of the Mother of God. I have the myrrh from St George's in Taylor, Pa, from the myrrh streaming icon. I anoint them. A lot of people I have anointed, have been cured completely. And the doctors are at awe. They don't know what happened. It doesn't happen all the time. I have a brother-in-law who's a doctor. And one day, after

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Thanksgiving many years ago, when my father was living, we went for a walk after a turkey dinner. He says to me, “How do you define my job?” I said, “It’s the art of postponing death!” That’s all it is – postponing death. So, any healing that we receive in the church – any cure – is temporary because we’re all gonna die. People don’t like to talk about death, but we’re all gonna die. And when we die in Christ, we live. In Christ, death becomes a bridge to heaven. So, the point and the purpose of a cure, is not so that we go back to our sinful life. But the purpose of a cure is that we repent and then we intensify our relationship with Christ – so that we can prepare ourselves for eternal life.

Fr Mark: So even with the Blessed Mother, we still remember her during her falling asleep. She fell asleep but she assumed into Heaven – her Holy assumption. Even Christ tasted death for us. I remember one of the professors in the seminary when I was studying for the priesthood. He said, “The great miracle is not so much the resurrection, because if God is truly in Christ, then it’s no great feat. But the miracle is the death on the cross. God who could not die, He died for us. That’s the miracle. So, his death becomes a bridge from earth to heaven. How would we get to Heaven if it wasn’t for Christ? We couldn’t find our way. This is why he says, “I am the resurrection and the life of the world to come.”

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while including relics in prayer or during the time of need?

Father Mark: We don’t have our own biological children. So, we pray to the intercession of Saint Herman of Alaska, and through God’s mercy. We adopted children from Alaska – Sophia and Niklaus. They’re grown, but I call that miracle – my personal miracle – a huge personal miracle in my life. Maybe another miracle is that I’m working - God selected me to be a priest. So, I stand before the Holy altar like a I do every Sunday.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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Sometimes I say, “Lord, how did I get here?” So, a phenomenon, is me becoming a priest – and still being a priest after forty-six years. Celebrating the Divine Liturgy is a phenomenon for me – to be part of the sacred tradition, the laying on of hands dating back to the Holy apostles. The hands were placed upon me. I can trace the apostolic tradition to the early church. That’s a phenomenon. A great miracle of my life is my wife. I remember when I was in the seminary in my third year and I wanted to have a wife that would share my priesthood with me. We share it together and I was praying to the blessed mother at the monastery at St Tikhon’s. It was on the eve of Memorial Day pilgrimage and I hear an inner voice: “Your future wife is in church today.” And so, I looked and looked and then I found her. I introduced myself to her and I started writing and two years later, we got married.

Fr Mark: People lose sight of asking. The whole liturgy today was about intercession and that we pray for litany of sick people. We prayed for the departed. We prayed for sick people - a woman that came to me today after liturgy. She has dementia. Her husband brought her, so that I could anoint her with the Holy Oil [from the myrrh streaming icon]. So, I keep on anointing her. So, the whole liturgy, my whole life is a life of intercession. The problem is, we’re living in a “Me” country. People are interested in three people: Me, Myself, and I. But if we just open our hearts, we don’t have to open our minds – we should close our minds and open our hearts. The greatest journey for a person – the longest journey has the shortest distance – from the mind to the heart. Close our minds, open our hearts. The impossible possibility that the Saints are present with us all the time. They’re only a breath away. But, in this country, we’d rather do it our own way. And I kind of think that part of the problem is that we’re in a death-denying culture. The doctor is the art of postponing death. The priesthood is the art of affirming death. I’ve had over 800 funerals as a priest in forty-six years. No one on their death bed has said to me, “Father Mark, do you want to see my

financial portfolio before I die?” Nobody has said that. The only thing they would say to me is, “Father Mark, pray to God that I have another hour to two hours to live so I can see my daughter who is flying in to see me.” It’s all about relationships. And the greatest relationship that we have is with Christ with his blessed mother and with the Saints who are invisible. They become visible when we cry out to them. Holy Saint Herman, intercede for us. The problem is we don’t try. We are living in a post-Christian culture. That’s the problem.

Interviewer: Have you ever held any other religious identity in the past?

Fr Mark: I was baptized when I was an infant. And so, we have many converts who are coming to Orthodoxy – converts who come from disenchanting protestant groups. To be honest with you, converts want to become part of the Eastern church from the Roman church. Yes, I’ve been Eastern orthodox all my life. My wife has seventeen Orthodox priests in her family. So, I married-up really good.

Interviewer: There was some interesting phenomena that occurred at St George’s Orthodox church. There was a gentleman that passed away there – was brought back by the myrrh oil from the streaming icon. You probably know the story.

Fr Mark: I know the story.

Interviewer: Have you witnessed anything like that?

Fr. Mark: I had a man who had Stage three colon cancer. I anointed him with the Holy Myrrh right in his office. And I went to see him after the surgery. The surgeon told him, “We took an ex-ray before the surgery just to make sure where the tumor was. And I compared the ex-ray we had taken two weeks ago and saw that it’s not there. So, I opened you up, and couldn’t find your tumor, I closed you up, and you’re fine.”

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Fr Mark: A woman had Stage Four pancreatic cancer. I went to her home – anointed her with the Holy Myrrh, prayed to the blessed mother for her Holy intercession and the intercession of Saint Genevieve and other Saints. I forgot I was visiting her and I remember I didn't do a follow up on her. So, I decided to call her. When I [originally] visited her, she was in a hospital bed, fourth stage, receiving palliative care. And I said to her daughter, "How's Jean? I haven't talked to her." Her response: "She's doing the dishes Father, want to talk to her?" I am not surprised, not impressed by miracles, because miracles are normal in the church. See it every day. When I was studying in Moscow for my doctorate degree, the bishop who ordered me the degree in 1996. As an American, I was in the chapel they put you up in. And there was an icon of the blessed mother. There were four hundred seminarians singing. They sang the ethos hymn to the blessed mother. And every time we sang, I was maybe three feet from the icon. There were no flowers around the icon. Every time that happened, it was like a bouquet of flowers hit me in the face when we sang *Rejoice O Unwedded Bride*. And that happened about eight times. So, I had tea with the bishop following the chapel service. And I said to him, "Your immanence, every time we sang this particular hymn, it was like a bouquet of flowers that hit me in the face." And he took off his glasses and he put them down. He said, "Father Mark, we get nervous and excited when she stops doing that." So that's normal. So, gifts in the church, weeping icons, icons that have a floral fragrance to them, people being healed – why should be surprised? Christ became man to heal us. Miracles take place all the time. It's that we're curious Americans, and when it happens, we're at awe.

Fr Mark: To me, one of the greatest miracles is that Christ found me somehow – called me to the priesthood. I still don't understand it but I'm here. Someday, the mystery will be unfolded to me when I step down. But it's a miracle – a miracle every time I open my

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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eyes. It's a miracle when the sun rises and the sun sets. Creation is the cosmological proof of existence of God – his handiwork. So, the closer you get to Christ, the more you see miracles everywhere. The fact that you're talking to me, that we've come together is the sanctification of time. Time has been sanctified, and you're searching. Your thesis to me is a reflection of your journey. You're searching. So, I pray that you complete your journey. Don't ever stop searching.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to add, Father?

Fr Mark: Well, we're in a post Christian culture. It doesn't matter whether you're a Christian or not. Officially, it doesn't matter. When I get invited to give an invocation, they tell me, "But don't mention his name." You mean Jesus I ask "Yeah" [they respond].

Interviewer Note: I asked Father Mark why they would even say that.

Father Mark: "There's other religions here – we don't want to offend them." So, I ask them, "Why did you ask me then?" So, it's a post Christian culture. The Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, The USSR and the United States will switch their sides on morality, and when it happens, we won't even know it. The conference, the International Conference and Christian Family was held in Moscow – not in the United States. And religion, spirituality, the church – is alive and well [in Russia]. We switched sides on morality. What is immoral, is accepted. What is immoral is not accepted in Russia. The main church is the Orthodox church in Russia.

Interviewer: I asked Fr Mark if some of those more recent events are aligned with what we know from reading Revelation.

Fr. Mark: I kind of think we're too infatuated with the Apocalypse. I think if we're with Christ, we don't have to worry about that. Remember that the Kingdom of God is not a

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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place paved with streets of gold. The Kingdom of God is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. He is the Kingdom. If you find him, you'll enter into the Kingdom. It's a person. Jesus became a person. He said, "repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand." It's near. So, we have to repent which really means change. Do things differently. So, the Kingdom of God is a person – more than a place. I pray you continue on your search.

Interviewer Note: After our conversation, Father Mark anointed me with the with the Holy Myrrh – to help me with giving up bad habits.

Fr Mark: Pray for the intercession of the Mother of God - she can help you. Maybe the miracle is you came here and Fr Mark is gonna help you. Let the healing power of the Blessed Mother heal you with the Myrrh – the fragrance of the myrrh. The Dionysius was during the time the of the life of the Blessed Mother. And he wanted to make a journey from Athens to Jerusalem to visit the blessed Mother. So, part of holy tradition is his account of when he visited the blessed Mother. Not everything that happened in the church is in scripture. It's just a guideline. We have something in common - the love of the blessed mother.

Fr Mark: With the original icon, which is the Hawaiian icon, was brought to St Mark's and the priest found out that his icon was streaming. But the original Hawaiian icon they asked [name unclear] of Russia if they could have it analyzed. He agreed and the caretaker of the icon was going to be in Pennsylvania, agreed to it. They went to three different laboratories. And each laboratory did not know that they were analyzing it. And the result was, they found a rose fragrance that's indicative of the Garden of Gethsemane where the mother of God reposed. The oil from the olive tree in Libya, an Orthodox monastery, but that olive tree has been extinct for one hundred and fifty years. And the third thing

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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[ingredient] they found was that water and oil used – usually, oil rises to the top – but this gels together with no problem. And each laboratory discovered that. So how did the rose from the Garden of Gethsemane get to the icon? How did the olive oil that’s indicative to a monastery in Libya that’s been extinct for 150 years get to this icon? And the fragrance is very important.

Fr Mark: Saint Dionysius – this is the second century – this is what I’m going to anoint you with. Saint Dionysius meets the virgin mother of God. During the lifetime of the Mother of God, Saint Dionysius had journeyed from Athens to Jerusalem to meet her. He wrote to his teacher, the Apostle, Paul. So, Saint Dionysius was instructed by Paul. He wrote to Paul and this is what he said.

“I witnessed by God that besides the very God himself there is nothing else filled with such divine power and grace. No one can fully comprehend what I saw. I confess before God, when I was with John, the younger apostle began to shine among the Apostles like the sun in the sky. When I was brought before the holy Virgin, we went to visit John. (John was the caretaker of Mary.) I experienced an expressible sensation. Before me gleamed a divine radiance that transfixed my spirit. I perceived that the fragrance of indescribable aromas coming from her, was filled with such delight that my very body became faint and my spirit could not endure the signs and marks of eternal majesty and the heavenly power already present in her. The grace from her overwhelmed my heart and shook my very spirit.” (Orthodox Church in America, 2021).

So, as you work on this thesis, on miracles and relics, see how God can be operative in your life. Call upon her. Our lady, the Mother of God.

Interviewer Note: Then Father began the anointing while saying a prayer - A hail Mary - and anointed my forehead with the oil in a cross, and the same was performed at the top of my chest where the shirt was open, and on the wrists. Other prayer was said as well in the hopes to provide healing and the end of old bad habits no longer serving me. Father Mark

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

is an extraordinary servant of God and of our Blessed Mother. He follows Christ – always has. He believes in the Savior; our lord Jesus Christ and his faith is strong. Sensing this helps to restore my faith in my religion. With Fr Mark being the fourth member of Eastern Orthodox clergy, I have met and talked with, I have felt such a strong pull to Eastern Orthodoxy. It is a strong and genuine pull I have not felt in many years. Again, it feels like the gate has opened.

### **Anthropological Analysis**

#### ***Glenn Hinson***

In order to instill and create a sense of place, depth of feeling, and empathy for those interviewed in this study, I turn to the ethnography, *Fire in my bones, Transcendence and the Holy Spirit in African American Gospel*, by Glenn Hinson. Perhaps Hinson described it better than any other ethnographer of his day as he exclaimed in his first chapter, “...you got to be *in it to feel it*. And if you’re not *in it*, you just sit there and look” (Hinson, 2000: 1). Hinson goes on to describe Elder W. Lawrence Richardson’s, (a Baptist singer) take on the moment, that God is really with one when one is really in it. To this man, feeling the spirit makes the connection to the Holy spirit – a channel to God – a feeling of immense joy that touches one’s soul. The only difference between this awakening as experienced by the members of this African American church and that with parishioners from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches is the method of connection. Yet, the immense feeling and connection that all three describe are quite similar.

There is a transformative feeling that moves the soul of the parishioners of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches which is very similar to the way it moves through the gospel church described by Hinson. In many ways, people that turn to relics and icons of these churches are filled with spirit - even those who keep a distance from them as

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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we have seen with the scientists who investigated the Theotokos located at St Georges Eastern Orthodox church in Taylor, PA. And to these believers of the icon, it is truth.

Hinson shares a similar viewpoint. The saints of the African American sanctified community say that soul is the domain not of the body or mind, but of *spirit*. And when the Spirit touches spirit, the soul rejoices in an epiphany of truth and knowledge. To the parishioners I interviewed from both faiths, the healings, miracles and conversions were definitely a lived reality. And like Hinson, I also had a limited view of what that reality was until I began the interviews. It was not the Catholic Mass and its congregational responsorial or bells that pulled me into the shared feelings and emotions of those I interviewed. Nor was it the choir singing or incense of the Divine Liturgy that captured my awareness of a true lived experience. It was the oral descriptions of parishioners and how their faith grew stronger and how their lives were impacted that over-saturated my senses, much like the emotional pull described by Hinson in his second chapter of *Fire in my bones*. While Hinson describes the members of the choir as Saints, there are still parallels between the “experiential essence” that the Saints in his book experience which are closely similar to the life changing experiences shared by the parishioners, laity and clergy of both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths. The descriptions of their experience are a gateway to that slice of life they spoke of. They provided a moment of time that only they can truly internalize, and one that we can only view as a reflection. To fully comprehend their words, we have to shake off all our invisible robes of judgment we travel with. We must allow their subjectivity to drive above our road of objectivity. Hinson describes a similar stance in his amazing ethnography. “To recover this particularity and to confront the subjective engagement of those rendered faceless by ethnographic generalization, we must listen more

closely to the testimonies of our consultants, letting their words chart the maps of meaning. They, after all, are the experiencers whose experience we are seeking to understand” (Hinson, 2002: 328).

To put it in more simpler terms, I’ll refer back to a quote made by cartoonist Bill Watterson of *Calvin and Hobbes* fame. Watterson explained: "Calvin sees Hobbes one way, and everyone else sees Hobbes another way." Hobbes' reality is in the eye of the beholder. The so-called 'gimmick' of Hobbes is the juxtaposition of Calvin and Hobbes' reality and everyone else's, with the two rarely agreeing (Calvin and Hobbes Wiki, 2021). The analogy I am drawing here is that the reality of one person is not necessarily the same as our own, especially as anthropologists try to climb through the window of someone’s life if we were to use the analogy of a house as life itself. We may not necessarily have the same vision, smell the same smells, see what the other sees, hears what the other hears and feel what the other feels. So, we take up temporary residency in their home to pull back the veil of privacy as an attempt to connect with them, while leaving our presuppositions, judgements and bias outside the window we crawled through. We will not need that baggage we left behind under the window if we want to wear what they wear, walk where they walk, and feel what they feel – as long as we are invited to do so.

To get a sense of the lived experience as Hinson describes so eloquently in his ethnography, we need to separate ourselves from the outside world – its distractions and breathe in the lived experience of the experiencers – our consultants to moments in their life. “This forces us to treat tellers not as persons bound by cultural prescription, but as individuals who daily face the unexpected and extraordinary” (Hinson, 2002: 328). In many ways, I view this as bringing their experience, or to use Hinson’s term “testimony” to life, like an artist would bring his painting to life. The testimonies as we have heard from the

parishioners engages us. It challenges us to identify and compare their testimony with our own. Their words escort us on a trek with them, bringing us closer to their truths and their lived experience as an authentic encounter. Hinson provides the reader with possible scenario-based explanations that past ethnographers have relied on to explain supernatural activity but relies on a more common explanation in his text.

A far more common explanation, however, attributes “supernatural” experience to a host of mitigating factors – physical debilitation, sensory saturation, the stress of fieldwork, the buffeting forces of fervent testimony. Working singly or in conjunction, these factors are said to fuel the fires of fantasy, provoking experience that only seems to be supernaturally induced (Hinson, 2002: 333).

Like Hinson, I would argue that to weigh the supernatural encounters described by the consultants with disbelief is not only harmful to the consultants and negates their significance, but leads to abandonment of objectivity itself. Outside of the domain of Hinson, if we turn to sources of Catholicism to look for an understanding of supernatural phenomena, we may find a greater acceptance of our consultant’s testimonies based on their lived experiences. We may find that human intervention and other extraneous stimuli caused by the natural world will not always provide us with a comfortable position to accept the experience as genuine.

For Catholicism, the supernatural is beyond and above nature, not contrary to nature. It is beyond nature in that unaided nature could never achieve it of its own power, nor would nature require it for its fulfillment. It is pure gratuity on the part of God. The supernatural is not contrary to nature because it builds on nature, transforms the powers of nature and extends them towards object and modes of action of which it in itself would not be capable (Brantl, 1962: 57).

But Hinson and other religious scholars are not the only authority on supernatural phenomenon. There are other ways of looking at it, especially if one were to consider the experiences of Phil and his fellow pilgrims that witnessed the manifestation of a Saint at a Russian mausoleum. And if human intellect is only functioning on what its five senses can detect, then perhaps we are missing so much more by most, unless of course we encounter intervention of the divine. Perhaps we are limited to just those five senses until such a time when the sense of the sacred intervenes. Of others and those who cannot or have not sensed the divine, I offer a logical alternative to which leaves the door open to further inquiry posed by supernatural investigator Paul Roland.

We operate at the lowest frequency of existence on the densest level, the physical plane. Naturally, we tend to believe that what we perceive is real and that anything we cannot touch, taste, see, smell, or hear does not exist. Our world appears solid, but as science has recently discovered, this is an illusion created by comparatively low processing power of the human brain which cannot see the spaces that exist between matter at the subatomic level. It is comparable to looking at a photograph in a newspaper. We do not see the millions of dots that makeup the image and the white spaces in between unless we look at it through a magnifying glass. Nevertheless, the dots are there (Roland, 2010: 96).

### ***Clifford Geertz***

In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz views ethos as the main component providing the quality of life and people's world view. Religiously, ethos is shown as a representation of the ideal life as it is adapted to accommodate the current way of life. Symbol, he defines as anything that serves as a substance (a vehicle) to express a conception. So, through symbols, people define their world. "In yet others, however, it is used for any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception is the symbol's meaning – and that is the approach I shall follow here" (Geertz,

1997: 97). So, Geertz is really describing religion as a symbolic system that reinforces the real world of people as well as how people perceive the same real world. “That is, it symbolizes and interprets human existence and also the reasons for human existence, the nature of life, and the world view of the people” (Garbarino, 1977: 84). Geertz views religion as a compatible harmony that exists between a way of life and the metaphysic, but each borrows authority from each other and each are perpetually maintained or sustained. To Geertz then, “religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz, 1997: 97).

Unlike Geertz, I found the spiritual experiences and miracles that my interviewees expressed, to be more than a system of symbols. To the parishioners of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths, the experiences – whether in the church or out of the church – are very real and had a deep impact on the lives of those that had such experiences as described in the interview section. However, Geertz does raise the question about belief and asks (through a religious context) what it means. And as Geertz indicates, many anthropologists have avoided answering this question.

Of all the problems surrounding attempts to conduct anthropological analysis of religion this is the one that has perhaps been most troublesome and therefore the most often avoided, usually by relegating it to psychology, that raffish outcast discipline to which social anthropologists are forever consigning phenomena they are unable to deal with within the framework of a denatured Durkheimianism (Geertz, 1997: 117).

Geertz goes on to assert that approaching the experience may best be accomplished by accepting the Other’s authority, which Geertz believes will transform the experience, which lies outside of the ‘every day experience.’ He views the religious perspective is

finding acknowledgment or acceptance in those experiences. Geertz does provide another suggestion to the anthropologist that studies a religion scientifically, and that is to phase out (or put aside as he terms it) atheism, tones of atheism, and preaching in order for the belief to be viewed with greater neutrality, which then leaves assessments and evaluations as a remainder. In my attempt to comprehend the healings, conversions and miracles expressed by my consultants, it wasn't atheism that had to be set aside, but the objectivity of science I was mentored to follow in undergraduate years. But Geertz then questions the perspective of science. "There remains, of course, the hardly unimportant questions of whether this or that religious assertion is true, this or that religious experience genuine, or whether true religious assertions and genuine religious experiences are possible at all. But such questions cannot even be asked, much less answered, within the self-imposed limitations of the scientific perspective" (Geertz, 1997: 133). So, I would have to concur with Geertz that for the duration of this study, scientific litigations had to be suspended.

***Victor and Edith Turner***

In their short discussions of relics, the Turners appear to repeat what skeptics have already exclaimed through history – that the relics were numerous and replicated through times, especially during the periods of the crusades when the pilgrimages were numerous. Here, the Turners draw from the descriptions of previous complaints but fail to provide a highly detailed descriptions of the relics themselves or how they have helped to intercede on behalf of the faithful.

The Crusades opened Europe to a spate of relics from the Holy Land, with much reduplication – St. John the Baptist's head, countless phials of Virgin's milk, parts of her girdle and veil, portions of her hair, and enough pieces of the "true Cross," as Erasmus acidly observed, to build a ship. A notion grew up, in fact, to account for the proliferation of reputed fragments of the Cross: it was said that the holy wood had a miraculous power of self-reproduction and could never be diminished, however much of it was distributed. (St.

Cyril, patriarch of Jerusalem, likened the holy wood to the five small loaves with which five thousand people were supplied.) Shrines and waystations competed for the attention of pilgrims in the display of sensational relics: one example was a portion of the manna with which God had fed the Israelites! (Turner and Turner, 1978: 196-197).

Erasmus is known for his cynical outlook on relics and his objections to them are relatively mild compared to the violent protests and assaults against them that the missionary's and churches experienced during the Protestant riots of the Reformation. But the Turners also viewed the pilgrimages as a stylish way to maintain the apostolic authority with mediaeval political agency. "Pilgrimage became part of the structured social field of interacting feudal states and ecclesiastical institutions, and functioned to maintain it. Protected by ecclesiastical and political authorities, pilgrimage became worldly and fashionable" (Turner and Turner, 1978: 197).

The Turners also turn to the discussion of the Holy icons in their ethnography and compare the western natural view of the art to the eastern to the more two-dimensional type of imagery. They go on to describe how the icons are venerated during the Divine Liturgy, but any description of miraculous or divine supernatural healing that has been reported to be associated with the icons is conspicuously absent.

Icons are operationally more important in the East, however, than statues are in the West. Incense is regularly burned before icons, they are kissed and carried in possession; but most Western images (with the exception of those few which become objects of special devotion) are regarded as part of the furniture or background, and are not usually thought of as naturalistic portraits or representations, rather as heraldic or conventional emblems (Turner and Turner, 1978: 142).

What Victor and Edith Turner do provide to the reader is a description of miraculous activity, especially that of the Our Lady of Guadalupe vision within their second chapter of *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. Also discussed to some extents are visions of the Mary figure as experienced by St Catherine of Laboure, St Bernadette of Lourdes,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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France, and more in “Apparitions, Messages, and Miracles: Postindustrial Marian Pilgrimage” which can be found in their sixth chapter of the ethnography. The Turner team does provide a basic view of Saints based on a Roman Catholic perspective. “In Catholic teaching, the good dead, but not the damned may and do (as official reports of numerous devotions attest), communicate with the living, through apparitions, visions, dreams, and the like, and intercede with God to work miracles on behalf of the living” (Turner and Turner, 1978: 204). To the Turners, they view the communication (prayer) that exists between the living and the dead as a transmission of intercedence that exists between the Church Militant (Church members) and Church Triumphant (Saints in Heaven). Later on, they also describe the interaction as a domain of the visible communicating with the invisible. The Turners stop short of ascribing the answered prayers as evidence of divine intervention. “But the “favors” as they are often called, are not sufficient proof that direct supernatural communication or intention has occurred. There is still plenty of room for natural explanation” (Turner and Turner, 1978: 205).

It is this view, as the Turners expressed here, that many parishioners and Christians alike, view as atheism because to deny the miracles is to deny that God even exists – a view expressed by many postmodern theologians – that like-events can be explained by natural means occurring in the natural order of the world. However, what many atheists fail to understand is the view of the Christian parishioner – that those natural events are also part of God’s providence. In the argument put forward by atheists, they will claim that miracles cannot occur because miracles will break scientific law. According to the Cristian Medical Fellowship website, atheists have an unclear view of what scientific theory is all about.

"Scientific theories are not prescriptive but descriptive. They do not prescribe how nature must behave. Rather they describe how nature has behaved in the past - as a basis of predicting how it might behave in the future. Accordingly,

no scientific theory is carved in letters of stone. Any theory can be disproved by a single fact, which means that scientific theories are often being updated in the light of new observations. A true scientist does not ignore facts which don't fit his theory. Rather he modifies his theory to accommodate these facts. We accept that miracles happened because reliable witnesses observed them. Whether or not we can explain them in terms of existing scientific theories is irrelevant.” (Christian Medical Fellowship, 2021).

For the Turners, they accredit the belief of the supernatural to the Christian belief, specifically the Catholic belief in their ethnography, that the mysterious and supernatural had occurred in biblical times and can still occur today as a result of powers independently acting on living people’s prayers (requests for help) beyond some sensory veil. When such events occur, what separates the two orders from each other is a tear in this veil.

The Turners conclude in their seventh chapter that sites and objects that are known for their associations with Saints, become liminal when pilgrimages to holy sites become interconnected with non-religious structures. In their view, this occurred during the High Middle Ages as the earlier pilgrimages were strictly voluntary – an act of the faithful. Later pilgrimages became bureaucratized. “As Christianity developed, pilgrimages became integrated with the total system. In the High Middle Ages, especially when the church became strongly structured, pilgrimage was incorporated into its penitential system, and was even prescribed as a punishment for secular crimes” (Turner and Turner, 1978: 232). In many ways, this helped the church maintain ecclesiastical control over the masses.

### **Theological Analysis**

So, what is faith in the intercession of Saints? Is it complete confidence and trust in what we learn from catechisms, the liturgy, the sacraments, the artifacts of relics, icons, and similar religious items? Is faith much more? Is it a *logos* –a knowing deep in our internal being that is always there for us that we rely on to make decisions and guide us in life? Is it based on what we learn from others – the personal stories of healing, both spiritually and

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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physically, as well as the conversions we witness and learn from? Is the faith built on affirmation of the power of the saints, or the conversion of those who have no faith?

We have the artifacts which are the relics of Saints. Through prayer and faith in the relics, we can find evidence of faith in the Saints who in turn had faith in Christ. We have the stories of those – the testimonials of the faithful that were helped, saved, cured, and healed by belief in the relics or the Saints themselves that intercede for us on our behalf in heaven. We have the miracles that we have witnessed in the churches, the hospitals and in our homes that have demonstrated over and over again that faith is very real and intercession is very real. So, faith may be just a belief to some and nothing more, perhaps because they have not lived the experience, nor witnessed the intercession of the Saints. But faith to many more is like a fountain that runs in our veins and nourishes our relationship with the divine. Often times, we need to recharge that fountain, and for many, the Church is there for them. But we must bring God into our own homes, and into our fountain to really feel that connection to the Saints. We must internalize that life giving force and allow it to flow and recharge our faith - the fountain of our relationship with God. The relics and miraculous icons can be the vehicles we need to recharge the faith that is in all of us. They can be vital to us to strengthen and nourish the fountain of faith. The Saints are very real and so is their ability to intercede for us on our behalf. All we have to do is ask for their assistance – to pray for us in order to restore peace in our minds and health in our bodies and to give us renewed faith that can once again flow within our fountains.

Intercession does occur and to many of the faithful, it occurs every single day. To the people, the faithful I have talked with in this study, their faith in the Saints and relics they venerate for help have produced physical healing, spiritual healing, conversions and miracles. As we heard from Phil, the theology of relics must be experienced and is very

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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unique to the faithful. And, it holds a much deeper meaning than anything you can read out of a book. To Phil, they are the meeting place with God.

The healings encountered and expressed by the interviewees are listed below and each category is further explored.

### **Physical Healing**

Successful back surgery  
Successful pregnancy & childbirth  
Removal of pain  
Cured of chronic ailment  
Prevention of suicide  
Cured of cancer  
Cured of brain tumor  
Limbs healed  
Mother's health restored through prayer  
Cured of Stage 3 colon cancer  
Cured of Stage 4 pancreatic cancer

### **Spiritual Healing**

Healed conscience  
Restored ability to run, and climb without pain  
End of nervousness  
End of chronic, uncontrollable crying  
Balanced acceptance of science and faith  
World view perspective changed – from no children to wanting children

### **Conversions**

Scientists to Eastern Orthodox member  
Muslim to Eastern Orthodox member  
Atheist to Roman Catholic Clergy Nun

### **Miracles**

Life extension  
Life restored from death (heart attack victim)  
Visions of Blessed Virgin Mary  
Appearance of Roses  
Scent of Roses / Divine  
Myrrh Streaming  
Manifestation or vision of Saint Xenia  
Water from Risen Christ statue in Medjugorje  
Appearance of divine refulgence (purple lights)  
Prevention of Vehicle accidents & possible injury and/or death  
Appearance of Roses  
Faces of people passing lighting up / glowing  
Appearance of Saints performing duties

### ***Physical Healing Discussion***

The physical healing that occurred and was described by the people I interviewed for this research bordered on the realms of miracles and some could justifiably be described as miracles. In considering the Padre Pio glove, a knitted glove that was reported by Loretta, it is commonly known that Padre Pio wore gloves on both hands to cover the marks of the stigmata – which is a divine favor bestowed on one, where the marks of the crucifixion develop on their body corresponds to the same marks found on the body of Jesus. At age thirty-one in 1918, all five marks of the stigmata began appearing on the Padre's body. "Padre Pio bore the wounds and suffered the unending pain every day for the next fifty years of his life. Doctors said he lost up to one cup of blood a day through the bleeding wounds and the holes in his hands were so large at times; they claimed it would have been possible to stick their entire finger completely through the wound to the other side" (Sniadach, 2010,144). Supposedly, the blood from his wounds he experienced emitted sweet-smelling perfumes. The glove I examined from Loretta also emitted sweet smelling perfumes - that of roses to be exact. Such an aroma typifies the sufferer to be in a state of holiness. "The presence of this aroma is the first test in determining a true Stigmatic. The aroma is known as the Odor of Sanctity and is said to be given by God to represent one's holiness and love for Him. The second test is a blood test. Although physically, medically and physiologically impossible, the blood which flows from the wounds of a true Stigmatic, more often than not, is a different blood type and does not match the Stigmatic's own blood" (Sniadach, 2010,140).

Those who bear the marks of the stigmata are said to endure the same excruciating pain as Christ. According to Keith Sniadach, in his book, *Relics of God, A Supernatural Guide to Religious Artifacts, Sacred locations & Holy Souls*. Stigmatic people experience

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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intense pain – pain experienced similar to Christ during the Passion and therefore, become co-sufferers, and may experience visions of the actual Passion. Stigmatics are said to have observed apparitions of other Saints and engage in conversation with them. Padre Pio, however, had not only experienced the same passion, but was reported to be responsible for many supernatural occurrences. Those occurrences include the ability to restore sight to the blind, Bi-location (the ability to appear in two places simultaneously), ability to multiply food, and so much more.

The testimonies of the those I interviewed relating to the glove of Padre Pio is remarkable, especially if we consider the testimony of Loreta and her second-hand account of Pauley's success in bringing out the physical healings of those the glove came into contact with. One cannot provide a reasonable explanation of the purple lights that flashed and darted across the hospital room when Pauley placed the glove on the chest of the dying woman in the hospital bed.

In considering the stigmata that Padre Pio was graced with, (secularists would refer to this as an affliction) and the abilities of the gloves to heal that he used to cover the stigmata, others have also experienced similar phenomenon and have since been canonized by the Roman Catholic church. However, the manifestation of the stigmata has not always been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as a legitimized miracle, although other Saints are known to have experienced the phenomenon and were later canonized by the same authority such as Saint Catherine de'Ricci, and Saint Francis of Assisi. Others, however, passed away and many have forgotten about them. In 1928, a Roman Catholic commission of two Bishops and four medical doctors and professors investigated the stigmatist claims from the German Catholic family of mystic, Teresa Neumann. The commission concluded

that they had never actually witnessed the oozing and spurting of blood as claimed by the family and offered similar analysis that was made by medical experts eight years earlier.

“The diagnosis reached by the four professors only confirmed that already pronounced by the medical experts who had visited her on February 27, 1920, before her ecstasies: “very serious hysteria with blindness and partial paralysis”. This second time it was formulated as follows: “a state of serious hysteria, with all the symptoms typical of the disease, including the usual factor of simulation”. In spite of the family resistance which hampered this episcopal and medical inquiry, it was concluded that no real stigmatization existed” (Omez, 1958: 92). Although Neumann passed away in 1962 of cardiac arrest, persistent claims of Neumann’s stigmatism continued to flourish despite the findings of the inquiry. The Roman Catholic position has never really recognized or denied the claims that persist till today. In 2005, a petition of beatification was submitted with the signatures of over forty-thousand people to the Roman Catholic Church and formal proceedings for this process has begun, although it remains unclear on the current status of Neumann’s beatification.

The case and current unclear state of Theresa Neumann does not negate, nor falsify all other cases of physical healing that is believed to have taken place through the intercession of the Saints, their relics and icons. Father Stephan’s discussion of the tumor that had miraculously been healed through the intercession Saint Nektarios is an example. Moreover, the healing power of the oil from the myrrh streaming icon, the Kardiotissa, has healed an unknown number of people from tumors, cancer, and other physical maladies. Additionally, it is associated with the ability to cure infertility as we have learned from the claims presented by Father Lawrence. The most extraordinary testimonial is the ability of the

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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myrrh streaming oil of the Kardiotissa to restore life back to a parishioner who suffered a heart attack while attending the Divine Liturgy. Not only did the parishioner revive, he sprang to his feet and began singing. Other than the application and usage of a defibrillator, a device that sends an electric shock directly to the heart to someone in cardiac arrest, I can find no other scientific method or instrumentation to revive a person who has “flatlined” on a church floor. In fact, a defibrillator was not used in this case. The oil from the icon therefore, had to have some positive impact or effect on the heart attack victim. And the victim just did not slowly awaken and sit up in a pew with a dazed expression - the victim immediately recovered, stood and sang a church hymnal – completely without the application of science.

The case of infertility experienced by women and evidence of this condition to be miraculously reversed (where the same women became pregnant) after coming into contact with myrrh streaming icons cannot be explained scientifically. There appears to be no scientific evidence pointing to the curative properties found within the myrrh streaming oils or the icons themselves – at least not the curative properties that many females seek to allow them to conceive healthy fetuses. Likewise, the myrrh oil and rose water alone have not been found to physically contain any curative properties that can be used to eradicate cancerous tumors and other physical ailments from the human organism that modern medical science has been tackling since the development of chemo therapy and other nuclear medicine-based treatments. Cell mutation is cell division that occurs out of control – leading to the development of cancerous growth in the body. Just what changes that occur biologically, (as the myrrh streaming oil interacts with human tissues) and to the cancerous growth is unknown, scientifically. Spiritually, much more is happening on a miraculous scale. As Father Lawrence indicated in the interview, not everyone is cured by coming into contact

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

with the myrrh streaming icon and its associated oils. Although one could also make a similar argument regarding modern medicine - that not all medicine works for one hundred percent of a population, at one hundred percent of time. In both, there are always outliers or exceptions. However, for the myrrh streaming oil to have *any* affect at all on people's biology, is unexplainable to the secular and those who place their faith in medical science. The same oil that was used by Fr Mark went through three separate laboratory testing's, with each laboratory unaware of the oil's origin. It seems quite remarkable that results indicate the rose fragrance originates from the Garden of Gethsemane where the Mother of God reposed. The oil too originates from Libyan olive tree which has been extinct for one hundred and fifty years. Finally, the oil is known to unnaturally mix with water evenly.

Yet to the faithful – those with faith in the Saints to which they visit, the icons and other artifacts associated with the Saints, the belief in the curative power of these artifacts is not a faith in the objectivity of science, but a faith in their beliefs. To those who experienced conversions from the secular and atheistic camps, to the belief in a higher Holy power, a birth of faith has entered their consciousness – in the healing power of the relics and icons. Therefore, belief in the intercession of the Saints is very real, as much as the belief by others in modern medicine's ability to cure people of biological maladies. A main difference is that there is no way to falsify the healing power of icons and relics, or to even test the curative properties of either. There simply is no litmus test or simple qualitative or quantitative test one can conduct on the relics and icons to determine a sense of the divine. Perhaps this is because no scientist on the planet has yet successfully developed a litmus test for faith. So, this begs the question.

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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What do we have here? We have faith and miracles that occur and science struggles to provide a valid explanation for the cures that manifest when people put their trust and faith in the relics and icons of the Saints. Oh yes, occasionally we read about the stories through second hand and third hand accounts in newspapers, social media and religious websites, and sometimes we hear about the miracles that occur when someone successfully publishes a book based on their personal stories, struggles and affected cures they underwent by placing their faith in the relics and icons of the Saints. One can decant or bottle wine and one can bottle tea, but one cannot decant or bottle faith. Faith is real when it occurs – when it happens to one who has it or desires it, and that faith is manifested through God. When one has faith or receives it through prayer, or devotionals, or through contact with the divine, then one knows they have the faith as expressed by the parishioners, laity and clergy from both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. They have experienced this faith first hand because they experienced the positive changes that occurred to them without the benefits of modern medical science.

To compare the miraculous physical healing as described by the interviewees – what they believe can be attributed to divine intervention, the intercession of Saints and relics associated thereof - to modern medical healing, is beyond the scope of this paper. However, what has not been taken into account are the opinions, stories, and beliefs of the faithful who attempted to be healed physically and have not yet had the good fortune to experience that healing through divine intervention. As many parishioners and clergy of both Christian faiths believe, miraculous healing is not a guarantee when spiritual or religious people pray, or seek the intercession of the Saints. The same rhetoric could also be applied to penicillin. Not everyone will be healed. In turning to God and the Saints who intercede for us, no one

human can provide a schedule of patients to be healed by divine intervention, nor can a list of names be provided of those who will be miraculously healed. There does not appear to be any pattern. No particular color, ethnicity, sex or choice of spirituality appears to be favored while others are not. No pattern has revealed itself. This also evident in the case of the woman whose physiology was not allowing her reproduction organs to bring a baby to term. As we can recall, the Texas A&M professor was astounded. She had to have been to exclaim, “In my opinion, this is God revealing himself in the language of science, because this is impossible! I like to think of this as the finger of the mother of God touching one of her little ones and making him whole.” Ergo, if medical science cannot interpret and provide a logical explanation for this phenomenon, what other reason do we have to believe that the unborn child was not miraculously healed through healing power of the myrrh streaming icon? How is it not divine intervention?

I do feel there is one important concept to keep in mind and this concept comes from the interview I held with Father Mark. It was in this interview that helped me to understand – that any healing or cure received in the church is temporary because we are all living beings. Healing through the Saints, the relics and ultimately through Jesus Christ is temporary for our life and death becomes a bridge to heaven. As Fr Mark expressed to me, the purpose of a cure is that we repent, intensify and prepare ourselves for eternal life with Christ.

***Spiritual Healing Discussion***

The spiritual healing that I have documented from the interviews may be more subtle (in print) to the reader, but much more profound to the person who has experienced the phenomena. Restored faith and, as well as a change of heart has led people to reconsider their outlook on life – from that of a negative, self-destructive behavior, to one more positive

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

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and a stronger belief in their faith – a faith in the relics and icons of the saints that intercede for them, and a stronger faith in God. From our discussions with members such as Loretta, we hear of the stories of a healed conscience and how a contemplation of suicide was prevented simply by coming into contact with the message of Pray, Hope, Don't Worry – a message attributed to Padre Pio.

Through prayer, we have seen the immediate ability of a church member who suffered much physical pain in her back and legs to be able to run up a flight of stairs three times without issue, and the pain that Christy experienced has never returned. Through prayer again, we learn how a woman's lifetime of nervousness and chronic uncontrollable urge to cry was alleviated and for this, we refer back to the story as told by Louise. Through prayer again, an Eastern Orthodox church member and laity reaches a rare, balanced acceptance of science and faith together as expressed by Phil. And through Jennifer, we discover how her lifelong outlook or view of not wanting children had changed to a desire to have children – four infants no less - simply by praying for the intercession of Saint Francis. That can be said to be true spiritual healing, which come through prayer and intercession of the Saints.

So how does prayer work one might ask? Is it simply a matter of faith building through repetitive prayer and confidence in an all-knowing universal theistic deity, or just the outlier of chance that prayer appears to be answered? To most Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox faiths, faith is essential to have for prayer to be instrumental in helping one meet their needs and pleas for their needs. Thomson Jay Hudson, the author of *The law of Psychic Phenomena, A Working Hypothesis for the Systematic Study of Hypnotism, Spiritism, Mental Therapeutics, etc.*, would confirm those beliefs held by the faithful today, that continuous prayer is naught without faith. “It is the Divine essence within us which produces the effect,

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

and operates in strict accordance with Divine law. It confirms and explains that which Christ taught so earnestly and so persistently, namely, that we must have faith, or our prayers will avail nothing” (Hudson, 1893: 263). Some without faith have been unable to express it or feel it and prefer to utilize more finite or fixed processes of reasoning. People with faith however, rely more on evidence they can appreciate and trust and that is the evidence of their senses which in many cases validates the healing processes that they have either witnessed or experienced for themselves. To Edward as we have learned, there is the ultimate connection. All relics, all of those feelings have to be understood that the connection all leads to Christ. As Fr Mark had said, the longest journey has the shortest distance – from the mind to the heart. Close our minds, open our hearts.

### ***Conversion Discussion***

Conversions have also occurred as we have heard through Fr Lawrence and his descriptions of the two scientists who arrived at St George’s Orthodox Church to scientifically study, measure, test and collect samples from the myrrh streaming Kardiotissa icon of the Theotokos in Taylor, PA. Here, what became of arrogance and a denial of divine intervention and an admission of atheism, became a transformation of paradigms – a total conversion experience. But this was not the only conversion expressed by Fr Lawrence, as we learn of the spiritual conversion of a Muslim to Eastern Orthodoxy during a religious service. On the Roman Catholic side, we hear of the conversion of a female atheist to that of a Roman Catholic Nun simply by coming into contact with a relic from Mary Magdalen. Another conversion was attributed to the Roman Catholic green scapular - an article of devotion, worn around the neck.

But does conversion mean we have to give up a life we are familiar with and start as whole new regime of thinking, acting and talking to others? Does it only happen when our

current paradigms are challenged and we see them crumble by coming face to face with a stronger reality? While that may be the case for some, as some people have experienced unexplainable life changing events, conversion for others does not necessarily have to be traumatic as it was for Apostle Paul. It can be a renewed partnership with Christ and the realization that Christ is the lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. Conversion may mean forgiving others of sins committed against another. It may be a self-cleansing for others and spiritual renewal. Yet to many, it is all of these. “A Christian is not simply somebody who stands a better chance of being “saved,” but a person who accepts responsibility to serve God in this life and promote God’s reign in all its forms“ (Bosch, 2012, 500). A similar conversion process had occurred to Victor and Edith Turner when they were looking for deeper ontological values of ritual – something beyond the symbolic. Their studies on the Ndembu of Africa had a major impact on them and Marxism they found, was too inept for them account for the rituals they witnessed and participated in. In the book *The Slain God*, Timothy Larsen hones in on the transformative process that the Turners went through.

Therefore, while ‘primitive’ beliefs and practices made it impossible for E.B. Tylor to accept Christian claims, in a complete reversal, traditional African religion made it possible for the Turners to take Christianity seriously once again. Vic testified that when he witnessed a Catholic priest presiding at Mass: I felt in the texture of his performance something of the same deep contact with the human condition tinged with transcendence that I had experienced in central Africa when I attended rituals presided over by dedicated ritual specialists (Larsen, 2014: 183).

So, in their quest to search for deeper values, they turned to western religion. By 1957, the Turners had found that value during the consecration of the bread and wine in the Roman Catholic Mass. I have met some in life who have experienced a much subtler conversion process. For them, it was acceptance of a new religious canon and a new identity for themselves they came to accept and embrace. These people appeared more grounded,

more focused and more open to others they previously turned away. Robert Hefner describes the conversion process in *Conversion to Christianity*.

The most necessary feature of religious conversion, it turns out, is not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true. In other words, at the very least – an analytic minimum – conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-identification, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity (Hefner, 1993: 17).

### ***Miracles Discussion***

When it comes to “miracles,” or what people describe as such from their own personal experience, we discover how these events or occurrences had a tremendous impact on their worldview and especially their spiritual beliefs. Through the Padre Pio glove relic, we learn from Loretta how the life of her own biological sister was extended for an additional five years even though she had suffered from a life-threatening condition. We learn of the unusual occurrences and manifestations of roses from Christy and Louise and her daughter Judy which they attribute to confirmation of prayer being heard and answered by St Theresa Di Gull. At Medjugorje, parishioners visiting there on a pilgrimage from St Mary Magdalen church describe the miraculous manifestation of water from the Risen Christ statue – especially from Ted. We learn how the water was also tested and are allegedly of the same watery substance found in human tears. And at the same time, we learn the height of the knee on the statue was the height that the Blessed Mother could reach while her son was on the cross. And at that height, she wept for her son. From Edward, we hear how he was saved from a vehicle accident, possible injury and death by praying to God on a busy highway on Long Island, NY.

A mysterious spirit manifested in front of Phil and several other witnesses in Russia during a pilgrimage which we learn the group had attributed to Saint Xenia. The same spirit even allegedly interacted with Phil and his fellow pilgrims. While it would be very difficult to recreate the same experience at the same mausoleum, and under the same environmental conditions that Phil experienced with his co-pilgrims, a secularist would argue that the group had a momentary total suspension of objective consciousness, and their witnessing of the phantasm could have been induced by some unknown environmental condition – a subjective condition. However, each member of the group had witnessed the same phantasm or spirit and were able to deduce that the spirit was of intelligent design and acknowledged their presence. According to Phil, each member of the group positively identified the spirit as Saint Xenia. But it is not my intention to debate the existence or non-existence of post mortal spirit manifestation in this paper. The focus of this study is to demonstrate the healing power of relics and icons and like items associated with the Saints as described by witnesses.

While the oil of Nektarios can be considered a healing substance as told by Father Stephan, because we learn it healed a man with a tumor the size of a grapefruit, we also have the body of the Saint himself who is believed to walk from place to place. Additionally, the same Saint following his passing is said to have married, buried, baptized, chrisimated, and preached to people. Finally, a handwriting sample was analyzed by a graphologist and the same expert believes it to be the handwriting from the same Saint.

We do not know the origin of flashing purple lights observed inside of a hospital room as reported by Pauley through Loretta, and witnessed by several people. But the same lights were present when the glove of Padre Pio was brought out and placed on the chest of a dying patient. From Fr Cassidy, we first learn of the myrrh streaming Kardiotissa icon and how the sacred oil had multiplied in volume before his very eyes. We also learn from Fr

## **Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**

Cassidy how a woman who was diagnosed as infertile by medical science, but came into contact with the Kardiotissa and had months later discovered she was now an expecting mother. So much more had been mentioned that warrants discussion however.

Today, just how the miracles, as they may be called, would stand up to the *Bureau des Constatations* that was formed in 1884 to study the miracles witnessed in Lourdes, France, is unknown. The committee – the Office of Medical Observations – was organized to investigate the cures associated with the shrine but has also been used to investigate other claims of miraculous healings and miracles. The committee exists of a mixed community of health professionals, nurses, doctors and even pharmacists. On average, the committee investigates roughly 30 to 40 claims annually. For a cure to be even considered unexplained medically, it must first pass through a criterion that works to establish the facts of a claim. The criteria below are a description provided by Reginald Omez, O.P. in his book, *Psychical Phenomena*, released in 1958, but has since then been updated.

1. Did the disease described in the certificate or certificates exist at the time of the pilgrimage to Lourdes? What were its distinctive symptoms?
2. Was the course of the disease instantly arrested while it showed no tendency to improve? What morbid symptoms then disappeared?
3. Is this a real cure? What certain evidence can be given? Did it take place with or without medical treatment?
4. Should judgment be suspended?
5. Is it possible to give a medical explanation of this cure? Does it fit into the category of natural law? (Omez, 1958: 87)

One narrow parameter I have noticed is how the third criteria would work against a pilgrim or someone miraculously cured of cancer or some cancerous tumor. Even though some cancer victims have undergone chemo therapy and radiological treatments – some proving that their condition has not improved using the modern treatment methods - then any sudden change, improvement, and remission of cancer may eliminate the claim of being

miraculously cured. If such an elimination were to occur, does this not negatively impact the faith (or belief in divine intervention) of the one who was cured? Since the commission is currently presided over by the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, some could argue that any negative declaration issued by the commission appears to work against faith and belief in divine intervention. To some, it appears that the more the Catholic faith tries to encourage membership to its church and any possible conversions, the more it appears to push away those who strongly believe their malady was cured through some divine intervention. What negative impact would this have on those with a developed faith, a renewed faith or recent conversion? More research would have to be conducted in this field to address this question properly and to determine if any such correlations exist between those cures associated with pilgrimages to Lourdes and those who also undertook pilgrimages to Lourdes while also receiving treatments at recognized medical facilities. One may also attempt to determine just how that faith in miraculous sites created new faith or renewed their faith in God or messengers of God.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Time had not allowed to interview all individuals mentioned by the consultants or even additional people discussed during the interview process. Those leads may be difficult to connect with, but such connections are not impossible. This would bring the researcher into direct contact with some who had direct, first hand contact with the supernatural and whose lives have changed. Their stories and personal encounters with the divine could be confirmed with the intention to obtain additional testimony, and perhaps physical evidence of such phenomena through medical records, church records, and perhaps any personal evidence they may kept for safeguarding.

The Rite of Exorcism is another topic that should be researched, especially if such a ritual were used to improve one's sense of wellbeing or provided a cure to a recurring ailment. Religious medals as well, which I had briefly touch on in this paper warrants further study if such religious artifacts and like items (i.e., scapulars) were thought to be associated with the physical or spiritual healing processes. Statues that have been recorded in the past to emit tears and even blood should be investigated. Statuary associated with miracles such as that reported and documented in Medjugorje were only lightly discussed in this paper because they remained largely outside of the focus of this paper. So many other topics can be researched and explored further coming to mind such as the instrumentality of holy water and the Blessing of the Throat for example all of which are recognized by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglican Communion churches.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the testimonies of the consultants (those interviewed) spiritual and physical healings, miracles and conversions have occurred. The experiences to the consultants and others witnessing the events and experiences, are very real to those whose lives have changed for the better, have been healed, or experienced such changes through prayer, intercession of the Saints and Martyrs, or contact with relics and icons associated with such Holy people. As such, these lived experiences become the reality of people who experienced these changes and improvements in their lives. Such experiences reside on the margins of the supernatural. For these individuals, no true litmus test or scientific measurement can prove or disprove the authority of their lived experiences. And as we have seen, healing, miracles, and conversion are not necessarily restricted to just parishioners, laity and clergy of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The relics and icons are not just artifacts "clothed in images or symbols" as the Victor and Edith Turner suggested. Nor are they just

representatives of bygone eras. The testimonies of the consultants are authentic descriptions and beliefs in the Holy power of prayer, relics and icons.

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Acts 5:14-14; 19:11-12

Deuteronomy 34:6

John, 1:14; 19:32-35; 20:25

2 Kings 13:21

**Note of Appreciation**

Debra Brophy, literature resources

Elena DiMartino, Mixed relics, spiritual support

Fr Jason Franchak, St Basil the Great Orthodox Church, Carbondale, PA

Fr Mikel Hill, St Tikhon's Monastery, Waymart, PA

Margaret and David Korytkowski: Roman Catholic literature and resources

Fr John Kowalczyk, St Michael's Orthodox Church, Jermyn, PA

Fr Mark Leasure, St George's Orthodox Church, Taylor, PA

Fr John Parker, St Tikhon's Monastery, Waymart, PA

Linda M. Pinckney, Proofreading, Moral Support, Partner

Fr Christopher Sahd, St John's Evangelist Church, Honesdale, PA

FIGURES & PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: Relic of St Teresa



Figure 2: St Teresa relic enlarged

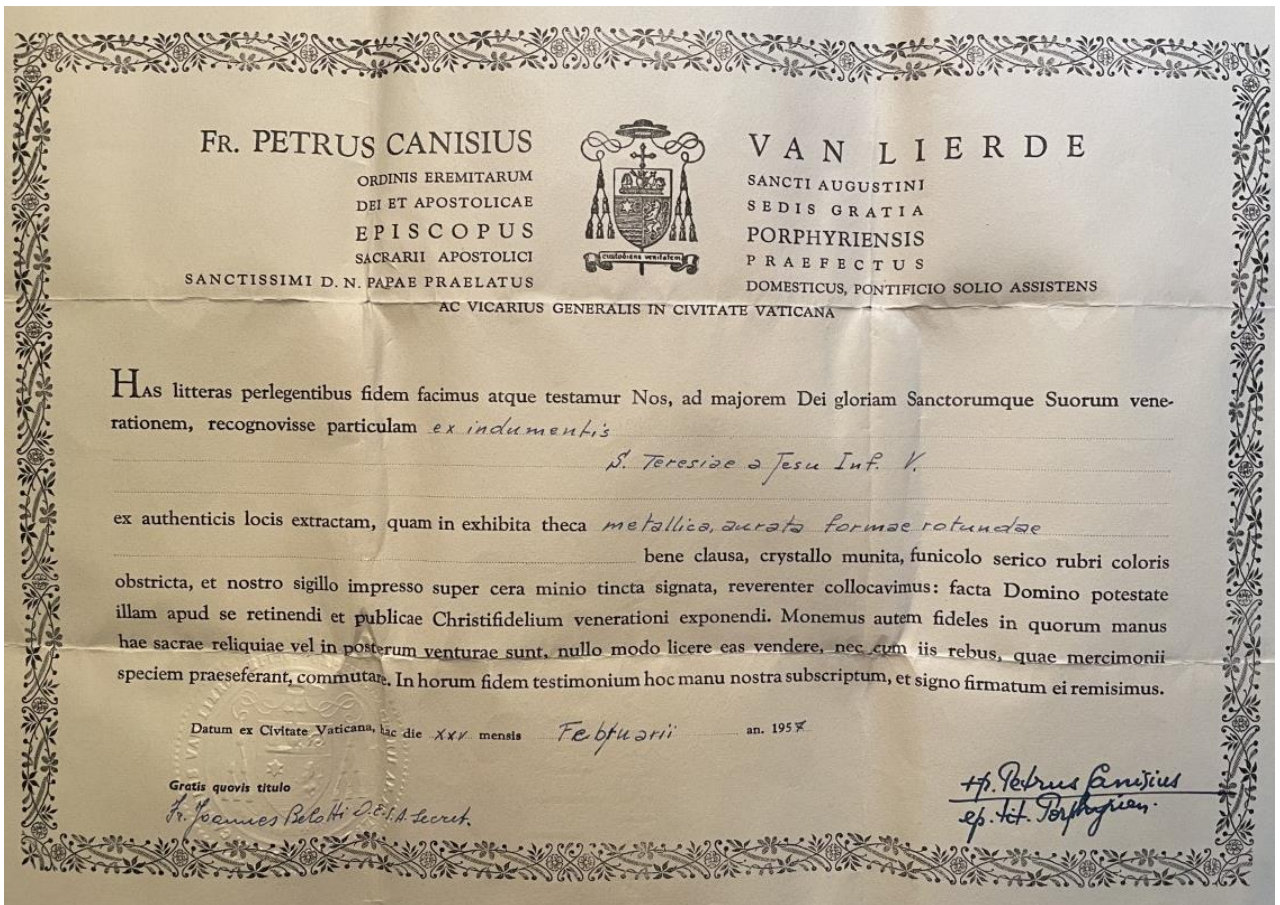


Figure 3: Official Vatican documentation of St Teresa relic





Figure 8: St Teresa Di Gesu 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 9: St Elizabeth Seton 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 10: Our Lady of Guadalupe image reproduction



Figure 11: Padre Pio glove 2<sup>nd</sup> class relic



Figure 12: Padre Pio bedsheet 2<sup>nd</sup> class relic



Figure 13: Padre Pio veil 2<sup>nd</sup> class relic



Figure 14: Padre Pio glove 2<sup>nd</sup> class relic



Figure 15: Padre Pio bone fragment 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 16: Photo card of Padre Pio in prayer



Figure 17: St Herman 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 18: St Basil 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 19: St Basil relic enlarged

**Relics and Icons, Their Role in Healing, Conversions and Miracles**



Figure 20: St Anna Iconzip



Figure 21: Seven Orthodox Saints 1<sup>st</sup> class relics



Figure 22: St Cyprian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class relics



Figure 23: 1<sup>st</sup> class relics from St George's Orthodox Church



Figure 24: Kardiotissa icon reproduction



Figure 25: Sculptor Workshop

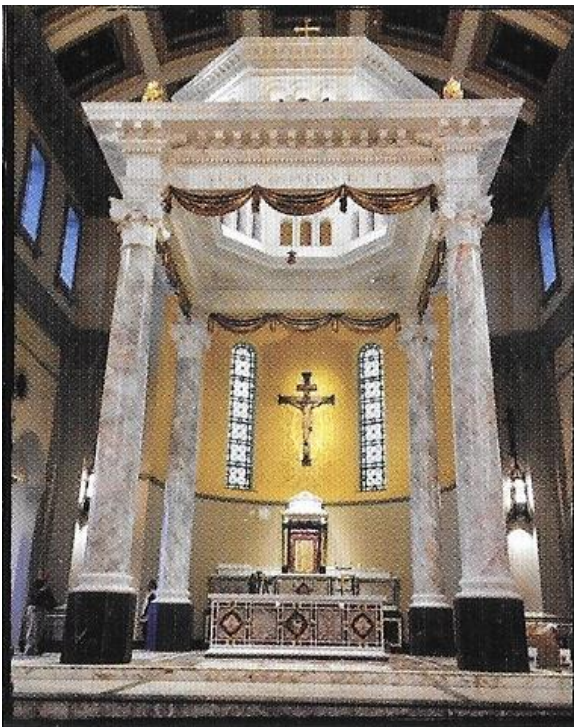


Figure 26: Four Crowns Atelier capitals of the Grand Portal



Figure 27: Sculpture of St Imelda Lambertini with 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 28: St Francis Xaverii 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 29: Reverse side of St Francis Xaverii relic revealing wax seal.



Figure 30: St Frances Xavier Cabrini 2<sup>nd</sup> class Relic

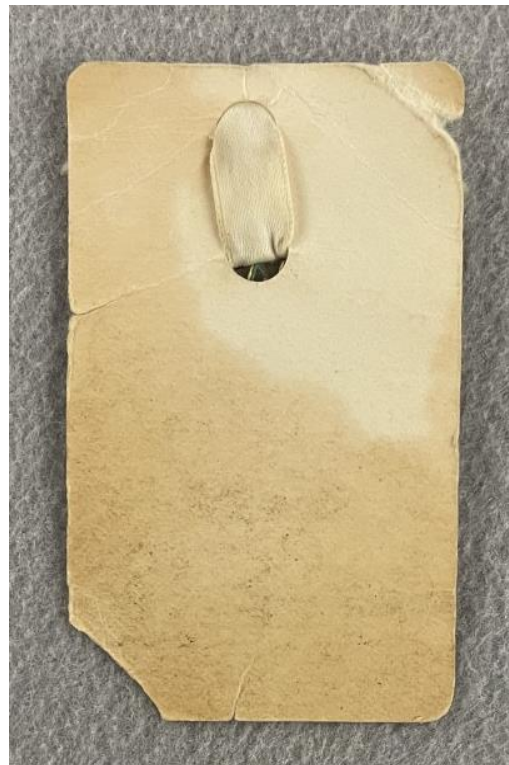


Figure 31: St Frances Xavier Cabrini relic enlarged reverse side



Figure 32: St Patrick 3<sup>rd</sup> class relic



Figure 33: St Patrick relic enlarged.



Figure 34: St Philomena 3<sup>rd</sup> class relic



Figure 35: St Philomena relic enlarged

In commemoration of the visitation of the  
Relic of Saint Mary Magdalen to the  
Church of Saint Mary Magdalen,  
Honesdale, PA

*November 16, 2009*

**PRAYER TO SAINT MARY MAGDALEN**

Saint Mary Magdalen, woman of many sins,  
who by conversion became the beloved of Jesus,  
thank you for your witness that Jesus forgives  
through the miracle of love.

You, who already possess eternal happiness  
in His glorious presence, please intercede for me,  
so that some day I may share in the same  
everlasting joy.

Amen.

Saint Mary Magdalen was one of the few who  
remained with Christ during His agony on the Cross.  
She visited His tomb with two other women and found  
it empty. It was to her that our Lord first appeared  
after His Resurrection. He asked her to announce His  
Resurrection to the Apostles.

Figure 36: St Mary Magdalen  
Commemoration card



Figure 37: St Mary Magdalen  
Commemoration card reverse side



Figure 38: St Bernadette 1<sup>st</sup> class relic



Figure 39: St Bernadette relic enlarged