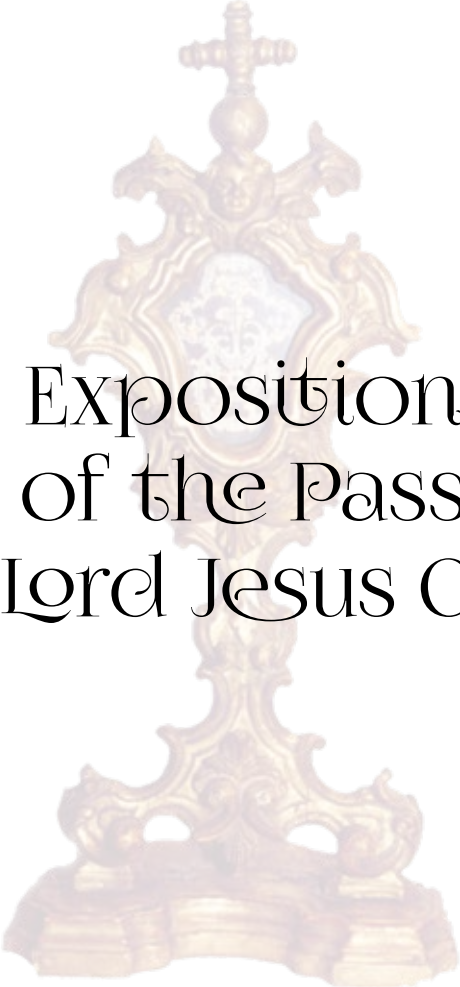


GOOD FRIDAY



Exposition
Relics of the Passion of
Our Lord Jesus Christ

BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Veneration of Relics

as stipulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), is an acceptable form of devotion and piety. Veneration of relics, visits to shrines, pilgrimages, processions, and the Stations of the Cross are forms of piety in which religious belief finds a form of expression that surrounds the sacramental life of the Church (CCC, 1674). These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church but do not replace it. Derived from the liturgy, they are to “harmonize with the liturgical seasons;” and lead the faithful back to the liturgy (CCC, 1675).

“At its core the piety of the people is a storehouse of values that offers answers of Christian wisdom to the great questions of life. The Catholic wisdom of the people ... creatively combines the divine and the human, Christ and Mary, spirit and body, communion and institution, person and community, faith and homeland, intelligence and emotion.” (CELAM, Third General Conference, Puebla, 1979, Final Document # 448 (tr. NCCB, 1979); cf. Paul VI, EN 48.)

In the early Church, the veneration of the relics of the suffering and death of Our Lord, was central to the observances of Holy Week at Jerusalem and the practice of pilgrimage. The relics of the passion, death, and burial of Jesus are the “first” relics of the Church and are considered to be of the “first class” because of the resurrection and ascension of Our Lord.

“Relic” is from the Latin *reliquiae* meaning “remains” or “remnants.”

**Instruments of the Passion of Our Lord
are considered the most precious of all relics.**

HOW TO VENERATE THE RELICS

1. When approaching the reliquary, the 2nd person in line makes a *Profound Bow* - from the waist--then approaches the reliquary.
2. Reverence the relics by touching **ONLY** the fingers/hand to the protective glass.

For reasons of health and as a courtesy for one another, the kissing or touching of the lips to the protective glass is forbidden.

No object/s other than the hand may be used.

Touching of cards, medals, rosaries etc is forbidden.

What is important is a person of faith, coming into physical contact with objects of faith, in a moment of faith that transcends time.

3. Out of necessity and consideration for others, the time allotted for each person *is limited to the BOW and the praying of ONE GLORY BE TO THE FATHER.*
4. It is recommended that the faithful return to a pew, where he/she continues to pray and meditate on Holy Scripture, in the presence of the Relics of the Passion and the community of the Church.

OF HOLY MEMORY: RELICS OF THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

Geraldine M. Rohling, PhD, MAEd
Archivist-Curator

There is an old saying among the rabbis: “To remember is to give life.” The narration and recalling of memories is essential to both the human and the faith experiences. Each year during Triduum we participate in a storied observance of our salvation. Like the Passover celebration of our Jewish ancestors, we tell and re-tell stories of faith, tradition, and heritage; we remember God’s salvation to us, to our forebears, and that which is promised to our descendants. Sacred Scripture is the basis for all that we believe and all that we celebrate; it forms us, instructs us, and most importantly, defines us. Sacred Scripture is our official shared memory.

Individuals are initiated into the faith community, in part, through the acceptance of Sacred Scripture. This is most eloquently expressed in the Rite of Acceptance, the first of the “threshold rites” for the initiation of adults into the Catholic Church. The “inquirers,” welcomed publicly and officially, become Catechumens. They are marked with the sign of the Cross and they are given a personal copy of Sacred Scripture to be read during the period of preparation and throughout their pilgrimage as a Christian.

In biblical narratives we are told that “remembering” is central to the faith. Never is this more relevant than at the celebration of his last Passover meal when Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me.” Thus, Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). This does not exclude however, popular pious practices, the simple and heartfelt “expression of a profound faith” (Pope Francis, 12 July 2015). One of the earliest known forms of popular piety—perhaps the first—is the veneration of relics.



A *relic* is a particle of the physical “remains” of a holy person (Latin, *reliquiae*, pl.). It can also be a particle of an object owned or used by that person; something that came into close contact with that person such as garments or articles of clothing. In the case of a martyr, it includes the instruments of their torment and death.

The relics of the passion, death, and burial of Jesus are the “first” relics of the Church. They are “the most precious evidence of the Passion or Our Lord,” (Amalric I, Christian king of Jerusalem, 12th C) and are the most esteemed and venerated of all relics. The desire to walk the paths that Jesus had trod in his life, to touch the objects of his passion and death, and to offer canticles of praise and thanksgiving at the site of the holy sepulchre, the empty tomb, were the catalyst for the pilgrimage practice.

The earliest extant written account of a Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem is that of Egeria, a woman, possibly a nun, who lived in Galicia (modern day Spain), the western part of the Roman Empire, during the fourth century. In her journal, Egeria tells of Holy Week rituals that included the reading of selections from the Passion narrative and other appropriate portions of Scripture, the singing of psalms, the recitation of prayers at each station, and the veneration of the relics of Our Lord. The following excerpt tells of an open air service on Good Friday, in the afternoon, at Golgotha (Calvary).

Then a chair is placed for the bishop in Golgotha behind the Cross, which is now standing; the bishop duly takes his seat in the chair, and a table covered with a linen cloth is placed before him ... a silver-gilt casket is brought in which is the holy wood of the Cross ... both the wood of the Cross and the title are [taken out and] placed upon the table.... the bishop, as he sits, holds the extremities of the sacred wood firmly in his hands ... [the] faithful and catechumens come one by one ... [they bow and] touch the Cross and the title, first with their foreheads and then with their eyes; then they kiss the Cross. (Translation by M. L. McClure and C. L. Feltoe, 1919).

Veneration of the Cross was a physical, tangible act of remembrance. Pressing the forehead to the wood of the cross signified the binding of the death of Christ to the memory of the individual and to the community. It was a public witness to a holy memory that transcended time. The profundity of the moment exceeds human comprehension; it can only be understood in “Spirit and truth” (John 4: 24).

In his final hours, Jesus promised his followers a divine Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Not only would the Spirit of God teach them, but the Spirit would also remind them of all that Jesus had taught them. “I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you” (John 14: 25-26). The Spirit of God is the bearer of holy memory, a storyteller.



The Spirit calls us to remember who we are and what we believe. It is the Spirit of God that calls us to holy remembrance. A ceramic medallion of the Holy Spirit and the four evangelists hovers above the main altar in the Crypt Church.

The veneration of relics, as stipulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), is an acceptable form of devotion and piety. Veneration of relics, visits to shrines, pilgrimages, processions, and the Stations of the Cross are forms of piety in which religious belief finds a form of expression that surrounds the sacramental life of the Church (CCC, 1674). These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church but do not replace it. Derived from the liturgy, they are to “harmonize with the liturgical seasons” and lead the faithful back to the liturgy (CCC, 1675).

The National Shrine is a pilgrimage church and as such, it maintains a treasury of relics and reliquaries, which include those of Jesus Christ and of his Passion: Table of the Lord’s Supper; Stone from the Garden of Gethsemane; Scourging Pillar; Purple Garment; Crown of Thorns; Stone from Golgotha (Calvary); Seamless White Tunic; shavings of the Spike or Nails; Sponge filled with vinegar (sour wine) and the Reed; the Lance; Burial Cloths and Bindings; Stone from the Holy Sepulchre; and the True Cross. The National Shrine also preserves relics of the Blessed Virgin Mary

and the women who stood with her at the foot of the Cross: Mary of Magdala, Mary, wife of Clopas, sister of the Blessed Mother. In addition, relics of the Apostles and Saint Paul are also reserved.

In summation then, consider the following account of Saint Gertrude the Great, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.

“As the saint ardently desired to have some relics of the wood of the Cross, that our Lord might look on her with more love, He said to her: ‘If you desire to have relics which will draw my Heart into yours, read My Passion, and meditate attentively on every word contained therein, and it will be to you a true relic, which will merit more grace for you than any other; and if you are not persuaded of this ... Remember what I did or said for you ... *thence you may know and be assured that the words which I uttered when on earth are the most precious relics which you can possess.*” (*The Life and Revelations of Saint Gertrude*, 1865, p. 460).

The relics of the life, death, and resurrection--the burial cloths found in the empty tomb--of Jesus are links to a holy memory; a threshold to a spiritual encounter within the Word of God. To the faithful, to those who meditate on the Word of God, a relic is as flint on rock, igniting the faith.

In the early Church, the veneration of the relics of the suffering and death of Our Lord was central to the observances of Holy Week and the practice of pilgrimage. On Good Friday, 14 April 2017, the National Shrine will observe Exposition of the Relics of the Passion of Our Lord 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. in the Crypt Church. The faithful are invited to come, to venerate the holy relics, and to spend time in holy meditation of Sacred Scripture.

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BEHOLD THE WOOD

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There is an ancient belief that when pious people sit and tell holy stories, God comes to listen (cf. Malachi 3:16). Pious stories were an important means of communicating faith and spirituality. Even today, they have an appeal and a talent that is without equal.

The wood of the True Cross is one of the oldest Christian relics. When the news of this “find” had spread, the questions began. What type of tree was it? From where did it come? How did the tree grow? Who cut it down? Was the tree cursed? In an effort to answer these and many other questions, pious stories and songs began to wind their way into the catechesis of the faithful. The most popular were based on the story of the “Expulsion from Eden” (cf. Genesis 3) and the apocryphal years that followed.

In the waning days of his life, it was said that Adam called his son Seth (“another offspring in place of Abel,” Genesis 4: 25) to his side, asking him to go to the gates of the Garden of Eden and beg the LORD for drops of the oil of mercy, which had been distilled from the Tree of life. Seth found his way to the Gates by following the footprints of his parents, as no grass has grown in those spots since they were banished. Upon his arrival at the Gates, Michael the Archangel approaches and tells Seth that he could not receive this oil until 5,500 years had passed, at which time the merciful Son of God would come to earth to save all who had died. This number referred to the number of years from the creation of Adam to the birth of Jesus. The basis for this calculation was the Christmas Proclamation, *The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, from the *Roman Martyrology*, which draws upon Sacred Scripture and world events to narrate the birth of Jesus the Christ.

So Michael gave Seth three seeds from the tree of mercy (Tree of Knowledge). When Adam died, Seth placed the seeds beneath the tongue of his father before burying him. From these three seeds sprang a “trinity of trees” united in one trunk but of three separate woods: cedar, cypress, and pine. It is said that Moses cut his rod from this tree and David composed his psalms beneath its boughs. Solomon used the wood in the Temple before cutting down the tree and burying it where the pool of Bethesda was dug in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate. There, the guardian angel of the tree would trouble the waters at certain times of the year and those who dipped into the waters were cured (cf. John 5: 1-9). As the days of the passion of Jesus were drew nigh, the wood floated to the surface of the pool. It was from this timber that the soldiers made the Cross. After the crucifixion, the Cross was buried on or near Golgotha, as was the custom, until the days of Saint Helena.

It is this account of which we sing on Good Friday:

*“Eating of the tree forbidden,
man had sunk in Satan’s snare,
when our pitying Creator
did this second tree prepare;
destined, many ages later,
that first evil to repair.”*

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THE RELICS

Amalric I, the Christian king of Jerusalem (1162-1174), wrote of the finds in the Holy Land: “The relics included the most precious evidence of the Passion of Our Lord, namely, the cross, nails, lance, sponge, reed, crown of thorns, shroud, and the sandals.”

Relics of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ (DNJC)

Particle of the Table of the Lord’s Supper
Particle of Stone from the Garden of Gethsemane
Particle of the Scouring Pillar
Particle of the Purple Garment
Particle of the Rope that bound the hands of Jesus
Particle of the Crown of Thorns
Particle of Stone from Golgotha (Calvary)
Particle of the Seamless White Tunic
Shavings of the Spike or Nails
Particle of the Sponge filled with vinegar (sour wine) and the Reed.
Particle of the Lance
Particles of Burial Cloths and Bindings
Particle of Stone from the Holy Sepulchre
Particle of the True Cross

Mary, Blessed Mother Relics (BVM)

Particle of the Veil or Garment
Particle of the Sepulchre
Particle of the House at Ephesus

Holy Women

Mary of Magdala, the Penitent
Mary, wife of Clopas, sister of
the Blessed Mother

Particles from the Scouring Pillar

According to early Christian sources, the scourging pillar was taken to the Church of the Apostles atop Mount Sion, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Today, a portion believed to be of that same pillar, is housed in a chapel in one of the oldest churches in Rome, Santa Prassede (Praxedes). It was brought to the church from Constantinople in 1223. During the Middle Ages there was such a devotion to this relic that the Holy See established a “Feast of the Holy Pillar” on the Fourth Sunday in Lent. The iron hoop, to which it is believed Jesus was tied, was donated to King Louis IX of France in 1240 in exchange for three spines from the Crown of Thorns.



The Inscription Tablet

The inscription was discovered with the three crosses. Tradition holds that (Saint) Helena divided it into three pieces: a portion was sent to her son, Constantine, another to the Roman church of Santa Croce in Jerusalem (photo), and the third remained in Jerusalem, as verified in the diary of the 4th-Century Spanish nun, Egeria [Etheria or Aetheria]: “both the wood of the Cross and the title are placed upon the table [for veneration by the faithful and catechumens.]”



Crown of Thorns

In the world in which Jesus lived, the crown was not a circular band or wreath, but rather a type of cap covering the entire head. This is supported by the studies of the Shroud of Turin. What is said to be the crown worn by Jesus is preserved in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris. In the early days of the National Shrine, Bishop Shahan had received a reliquary that contained spines from the crown of thorns. Unfortunately the reliquary is gone but its contents has been maintained at the National Shrine.



The Holy Nails

In *Lives of the Saints* by Alban Butler, we read that Helena was told that if she could find the sepulchre, she would also find the instruments of the passion of Jesus. This was in keeping with a Jewish custom of burying the tools of the execution near the actual site. This is corroborated in the writings of (Saint) Ambrose, who noted that Helena found the nails along with the cross and the inscription tablet. History records that one of these nails was sent to the church of Santa Croce in Jerusalem in Rome, along with the largest part of the cross and part of the title, where they are still preserved today.



The other two nails—there were three in all—were sent by Helena to her son, Constantine, who, history tells us, attached one to his helmet and the other to the bridle of his horse. Though not all agree with the bridle story, Gregory of Tours writes that the third nail was used to make a bit for the horse in order to fulfill the words of the prophet Zacharius: “In that day that which is upon the bridle of the horse shall be holy to the Lord” (14:20).

The current locations of the three nails is said to be the Cathedral of Notre Dame (Paris, France); the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flowers (Florence, Italy); and the Cathedral of Saint Peter (Trier, Germany, shown in photo). Filings from the true nails were given to prominent churches and persons, such as emperors, kings, and noblemen. Butler notes that some of these filings were used in the forging of replicas. In other instances, replicas were forged and “touched” to the original and then distributed, which a practice of (Saint) Charles Borromeo at Milan.

The Sponge

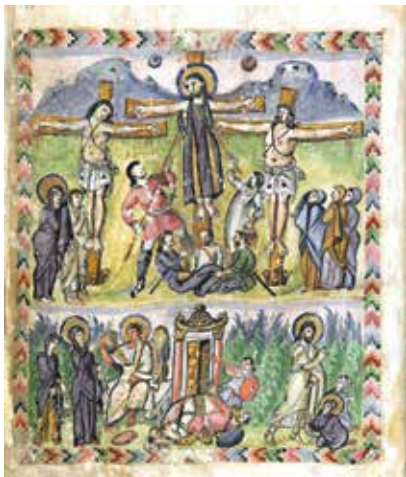
Both the sponge filled with vinegar and the reed to which it was attached were venerated in Jerusalem during the 6th Century. During the siege of Jerusalem (A.D. 614) these two relics were sent to Constantinople for safe-keeping. They were later returned. Today, parts of the sponge is said to be preserved at the church of Saint Jacques de Compiègne (France); the Cathedral of Aachen (Germany), where Charlemagne is buried; the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran, the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, the churches of Santa Maria in Trastevere, and Santa Maria in Campitelli (Italy). Gregory of Tours spoke of the reed and the sponge filled with vinegar, which he saw in Jerusalem. The earliest known image of the “sponge bearer” appears with the centurion Longinus in the Rabbula Manuscripts.

The Lance

John is the only evangelist to include the detail: “one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (19: 34). In the illuminated Gospel Manuscripts by the monk Rabbula (A.D. 586) the crucifixion scene shows the centurion with his lance and above his head is the Greek word, λόγχη or *logché*, which means “lance.” It is believed that the name “Longinus” is derived from this word. The name is also found in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, The Acts of Pilate, “Longinus the soldier pierced his side with a spear” (16: 7).

At some point in time, a name was also associated with the sponge-bearer: Stepaton. Although the actions of the two were separate, they are often shown alongside each other, as in the image from the Rabbula Manuscripts shown below.

Tradition tells us that the lance was discovered inside the Holy Sepulchre along with other relics. Nothing is known or written about this relic until the mid-6th century, when the pilgrim



Antoninus of Piacenza, a.k.a, the Anonymous Pilgrim of Piacenza of the 6th century (not to be confused with the martyr of the 4th century), recorded in his pilgrimage diary that he saw “in the Basilica of Mount Sion [in Jerusalem] ... the lance with which [Jesus] was struck in the side.”



Since 1492 the complete lance has been under the dome of Saint Peter's in one of the four piers facing the main altar, guarded by Bernini's sculpture of (Saint) Longinus, opposite the pier with the relic of the True Cross.

In the National Shrine, the Chapel of Our Lady of Lebanon, lower level, a version of the Crucifixion as depicted in the Rabbula Manuscripts occupies the center panel behind the altar. The Greek name however, is omitted.

The Burial or Grave Cloth and Bindings

These linens are not to be confused with the Shroud at Turin. There is another “shroud” along with other cloths and binding ribbons.

The Metropolitan Cathedral Basilica of the Holy Savior (Oviedo, Spain) houses a metal reliquary that contains a bone-colored cloth (33 x 21 inches), made of a fine, tightly hand-woven linen, which is said to be similar in texture and composition to the shroud at Turin. The visible stains on the cloth are also said to be of water and blood. The expert consultants and scholars who have examined this cloth believe it was used to support the jaw of Jesus. This is supported by the research on the shroud in Turin. A gap between the front and back of the head that was caused by a cloth or chin band tied around the face was noted.



The binding of the head, hands, and feet is a practice common to the Jewish rite of burial.

The Holy Sepulchre

The site of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is identified as the place of the crucifixion and the burial place of Jesus. Centuries of construction, both ecclesiastical and civic, have created many generations of this church and a very involved history.



Yet it was our pain that he bore,
our sufferings he endured.
We thought of him as stricken,
struck down by God and afflicted,
But he was pierced for our sins,
crushed for our iniquity.
He bore the punishment that makes us whole,
by his wounds we were healed (Isaiah 53: 4-5).

All Scripture quotations are from the New American Bible Revised Edition.

Relics are from the treasury of relics of the Basilica of the National Shrine
of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C.