

La Salle priests surprise flock with large collection of relics

Tom Collins 23 hrs ago 0



Chris Yucus

They want to be, be, be in that number, when the saints go marching in. First-grade students at a collection of relics on display at St. Patrick Church in La Salle. The students got a lesson on doctrine of sacred relics and Trinity's teachers couldn't think of a better place to hold class than which holds items from St. Clare of Assisi, Sts. Peter and Paul and Pope St. Pius X, among others.

On the last day of her March 2016 pilgrimage to Rome, Deb Myers of Utica hailed a cab to a small church near the historic Pantheon. She was paying a visit to an old friend — albeit one who'd been dead for 400 years.

Myers, a teacher at Trinity Catholic Academy, is a two-time cancer survivor who'd been directed to the tomb of St. Camillus de Lellis (1550-1614 AD), one of the patron saints of the sick. She popped into Rome's St. Mary Magdalene Church, knelt before Camillus' crypt and opened up about her twin bouts with the big C.

"After exiting the church, I was moved to tears," Myers recalled. "Initially, I was nervous about the journey to pray at his tomb. I knew in my heart I would need to accept the fact that I had recovered from cancer — again.

"The sense of peace in my soul was humbling. Since my visit to Rome, I have offered St. Camillus prayer intentions

for other people battling cancer.”

And, now, there’s no need to book a flight to Italy the next time she wants to chat with her spiritual friend. St. Camillus now is conveniently located a short walk from her classroom.

Right after Christmas, St. Patrick Church in La Salle set up a reliquary representing numerous saints, including St. Camillus. Five months earlier, La Salle’s priests received some unsolicited relics — that is, remains and articles from canonized men and women — and decided the collection warranted some dedicated space for prayer and veneration.

The logical spot was the little-used side altar inside the mother’s chapel on the east side of the church. Display cases were ordered and one day Myers and other parishioners were surprised to see 37 gold-trimmed casings bearing some familiar (and some not-so-familiar) holy men and women.

“It’s fantastic,” said Sister Norberta Piekos, a nun assigned to the parishes. “If you close your eyes you can feel the saints around you. They are always here with us.”

“When I first saw this, I was amazed,” said Jef Kulpa of Spring Valley, a parishioner and choir member. “But I don’t know most of the saints in here, to be honest with you.”

No shame in that. Since the time of Christ, more than 20,000 men and women have been raised to the altars; and studying the lives of the saints, a discipline known as hagiography, is a lifelong endeavor.

But a quick scan of the sprawling collection yields a few names that will be familiar to most:

-Peter (Simon called Peter), first of the 12 Apostles and the first pope

-Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, author of New Testament epistles

-Clare of Assisi (1194-1253 AD), an early follower of Francis of Assisi and founder of the Order of Poor Ladies (the Poor Clares)

-Peregrine Laziosi (1260-1345 AD), a Servite priest and the patron of cancer patients following his own miraculous recovery

-Gerard Majella (1726-1755 AD), a Redemptorist monk and patron of pregnant mothers and the unborn

-Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879 AD), witness of the Marian apparitions at Lourdes, France

-Pope Pius X (1835-1914 AD), the only 20th century pope to be canonized until John XXIII and John Paul II in 2014

“Everyone seems to be in awe,” observed the Rev. Jacob Valle, parochial vicar for the La Salle Catholic Parishes.

“Most churches usually only have about one or two relics — typically of their namesake — and kept in their sacristy, so they’re not accessible to most people.

“That does make us unique: To have so many relics on display and available for public prayer and veneration.”

And ‘veneration’ is the key word. Worship is reserved for God alone; but Catholic teaching encourages the faithful to venerate the holy souls by acknowledging their personal holiness and, if desired, seeking their intercession.

Relics are divided into three classes and range from items taken from the body of a saint (e.g., hair clippings, shards of bone) to items touched by a saint during their lifetimes.

La Salle’s collection spans all three. Now on display is a piece of a veil belonging to the Virgin Mary plus assorted items linked by documentation or sacred tradition to martyrs, saints and canonized popes.

Establishing a reliquary wasn’t a parish objective until parishioner Loren Morlan donated a number of relics to complement the parishes’ existing supply. The Rev. Gary Blake, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Oglesby, then offered his parish’s collection, which La Salle’s priests gratefully accepted

Myers encouraged others to visit the reliquary and seek out a saint whose patronage — whether for pregnancy, illness or a particular vocation — appeals to them, as well as to read up on the men and women who've been raised to the altars.

"It's enriched my belief in my Catholic faith," Myers said. "Saints are holy men and women who chose to serve God in a profound way. I believe we are all born to be saints.

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