



Relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis
photo by Marilyn Santos/USCCB

Venerating relics

A basic guide
for those who are unfamiliar
with this ancient practice

What are relics?

Relics are physical objects that have a direct association with the saints or with Our Lord. They are usually broken down into three classes. First class relics are the body or fragments of the body of a saint, such as pieces of bone or flesh. Second class relics are something that a saint personally owned, such as a shirt or book (or fragments of those items). Third class relics are those items that a saint touched or that have been touched to a first, second or another third class relic of a saint.

<https://www.treasuresofthechurch.com/about-relics>

Why do we venerate relics?

The veneration of relics in the Catholic Church is an ancient tradition that dates back all the way to the New Testament. We can find its origins in the life of Jesus Christ (think of the woman who touched Jesus' cloak and was healed). The church has always treated the relics of saints in a special manner, preserving them and often putting them on display for the benefit of the faithful. Relics of saints are typically housed in special cases called reliquaries and can either be seen in a permanent display in various churches, or in a traveling presentation, similar to the tour of the relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis and St. Manuel González García in the United States.

How should relics be venerated?

When venerating a relic it is most appropriate to show honor and respect to the saint or blessed by performing a simple exterior gesture. The *Directory on Popular Piety* explains that, “Popular piety is characterized by a great variety and richness of bodily, gestural and symbolic expressions: kissing or touching images, places, relics and sacred objects ... These and similar expressions...are direct and simple ways of giving external expression to the heart and to one’s commitment to live the Christian life.”

In general, the church recommends an exterior gesture that fits the occasion and corresponds to a person’s interior disposition. Someone venerating a relic can kiss or touch the glass case that houses the relic, or simply stand near the relic in a prayerful attitude, raising one’s heart and mind to God and invoking the intercession of the saint or blessed.

Other acceptable gestures include signing oneself with the sign of the cross or kneeling in front of the relic in prayer. However, a person should not genuflect before the relic in a way similar to genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament. To Christ alone is reserved that type of veneration.

Venerating the relics of saints is a beautiful practice that brings us close to those who walked before us in the sign of faith. They “ran the race” and

reached the end goal of Heaven. Seeing their relics and touching them can incite in us a greater urgency to strive for holiness, so that together with these holy men and women, we, too, can become saints, entering heaven at the end our time on earth.



Relic of St. Manuel González García
photo by Marilyn Santos/USCCB



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