

What is a relic? 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. The word relic means "a fragment" or "remnant of a thing that once was but now is no longer." Thus, we find in antique shops "Civil War relics" or "Relics of the French Revolution." Obviously, we are not talking about these kinds of relics but rather sacred relics.

Where did the Catholic tradition of venerating saints' relics come from? Scripture teaches that God acts through relics, especially in terms of healing. In fact, when surveying what Scripture has to say about sacred relics, one is left with the idea that healing is what relics "do." When the corpse of a man was touched to the bones of the prophet Elisha the man came back to life and rose to his feet (2 Kings 13:20-21). A woman was healed of her haemorrhage simply by touching the hem of Jesus' cloak (Matthew 9:20-22). When handkerchiefs or aprons that had been touched to Paul were applied to the sick, the people were healed and evil spirits were driven out of them (Acts 19:11-12). In each of these instances God has brought about a healing using a material object. The vehicle for the healing was the touching of that object. It is very important to note, however, that the cause of the healing is God; the relics are a means through which He acts. In other words, relics are not magic. They do not contain a power that is their own; a power separate from God. By Mary Rezac, taken from www.catholicnewsagency.com