



Seelos and Sanctity

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THE RELICS OF SAINTS

by Father John Vaughn

All through history devotion to the saints has primarily centered around the place where their mortal remains were buried. The Latin word for "remains" is "reliquie" from which our word "relics" is derived. People have always treasured the bodily remains of the saints just as we treasure keepsakes of those we love. The little fragments of bone were revered because it was the people's faith that told them that these bones at one time were the temple of the holy spirit. These bones were honored because it was felt that one day these bones would be joined together again to form a risen body.

In various periods in history the veneration of these relics took different forms. Sometimes the veneration was praiseworthy, sometimes it was not.

The ancient Romans had great respect for the graves of the deceased. Undoubtedly this respect for dead bodies passed into the Roman church. For the first six centuries the bodies were hardly ever moved from their original resting place. If someone in another locality wished a relic of the saint they would lay a piece of linen or silk on the body. This piece of cloth was venerated as a keepsake of the holy person. This is the origin of our practice of distributing pieces of cloth touched to the tomb of Father Seelos.

It was the custom in the early church to build the main altar of the church over the tomb of one of the holy martyrs. Thus St. Peter's Church in Rome is built over the exact spot where Peter is buried. The cross on top of the dome of St. Peter's is directly above the tomb of St. Peter, hundreds of feet below.

In the early altars there was a little window in front of them with a shaft that led down to the tomb of the martyr. The faithful would lower through the window pieces of cloth tied to a string. After the cloth touched the tomb it would be preserved as a relic.

In later years, however, many churches that were built over the tombs of martyrs were considered to be inferior. Thus very peculiar ideas arose concerning devotion to the saints. People began to steal the holy bodies and to tear them apart in order to have at least a portion of the body. We do not wish to indicate that we approve of this. In the course of history people have done many foolish things.

Today the church is much more cautious in permitting the use of relics. She also insists more strongly that the authenticity of these relics be verified before they are exposed to public veneration. It has happened in the past that false relics have been allowed to be venerated.

However, the basis for the veneration of relics is sound. Whenever you visit a cemetery to say a prayer at the grave of your mother or your father, even though you know that all that is left are some bones, you still feel a closeness to them. Preserving a locket of your mother's hair, or your parents' picture, or something your mother or father used often creates a feeling of closeness to them.

Thus our purpose in distributing pieces of cloth touched to the tomb of Father Seelos is a very ancient practice. Its purpose is to help you feel close to one of God's special friends. Creating within ourselves a feeling of closeness to God's special friends enables us to grow closer to God.

A PRAYER TO FATHER SEELOS

For your own intentions, and all the petitions placed before the tomb of Father Seelos, let us pause and say -

O, MY GOD, I TRULY BELIEVE YOU ARE PRESENT WITH ME, I ADORE YOUR LIMITLESS PERFECTIONS, I THANK YOU FOR THE GRACES AND GIFTS YOU GAVE TO FATHER SEELOS, IF IT IS YOUR HOLY WILL, PLEASE LET HIM BE DECLARED A SAINT OF THE CHURCH SO THAT OTHERS MAY KNOW AND IMITATE HIS HOLY LIFE. THROUGH HIS PRAYERS PLEASE GIVE ME THIS FAVOR . .

BELOVED CRIPPLES OF FATHER SEELOS

by Luana Thiel Jambois

There is physical handicap, obvious to the eye. There is soul handicap, a sickness of spirit, which manifests itself in actions which are the direct result of the severe crippling that is inside a person.

Father Francis Xavier Seelos loved his people. Mostly he loved those who were not "whole." Jesus, his Beloved Lord, said, "Go thy way. Thy faith hast made thee whole." Father Seelos, like his Master, prayed for the maimed of soul and body, the one so visible, the other so killing to the character that it became visible.

In Pittsburgh when he was stationed at the Redemptorist monastery, the distraught father of a thirteen year old girl came to him.

"Father, help her. She's dying." The man lowered his head, sniffing, wiping his eye with his handkerchief, trying to hold back the tears which shook him. He grabbed the priest's arm as though for support. "Father, I don't know how to say it! My Emily deserves this! It's a punishment from God! Thirteen years old and rotten and wild! And now God won't even let her tell her penance so she can die in peace! Can you help her, Father? They say you're a holy man."

"Not so holy." Father Seelos waited until the man quieted himself. "Come now." He reached for the kit containing the Holy Viaticum. "Let's go to help her. Have faith. Trust in Jesus. That is more important than being holy."

The mother waited, hunched over the bed and hopeless in her grief. The smell of death was in the room. The girl, rosy in her fever, looked like a crumpled child instead of the stormy young tart her father had described. But the father had not exaggerated her punishment. She was so ill she could not speak. The coma which held her did not leave.

"God, help your child," prayed Father Seelos. "Grant her the gift of speech so that she can rid herself of the evil and guilt in her soul. In Your Infinite Mercy, help me to cure her spirit and make it well."

There was no sign. Not the faintest flicker of an eyelash from the girl. He gave her conditional absolution. He opened the holy oil container to anoint her. If it was God's Will that it be so, so be it.

The child screamed as the holy oil touched her eyes! Her sobs were wild and loud, as though the devil which had nearly claimed her soul had been released. Then as her tears spent themselves she began to confess to the kind-faced priest who stood beside her. Out of that small mouth spilled the sins, terrible in their obscenity, even more horrible coming from the innocent face. "Father, forgive me for I have sinned. Oh, father, can I be forgiven? I'm sorry, God, because I love You."

It seemed as though the sounds of hosannas were in the air.

The girl did not die. She recovered completely and was no more a cripple of soul. Her life was happy and full of love.

Father Seelos, trusting in God as always, was not surprised. Had not a crippled man come to the monastery not long before? Had not God showed His Great Goodness then too?

"Father Seelos, cure me. I will not leave before you do!"

"But I'm not a doctor." "I don't care. I'm not leaving until you cure me!" The man had hobbled to the monastery window and thrown out his crutches. "You MUST cure me!" He had crossed his arms across his chest and stood leaning against the window. It was clear that he meant his threat. And the priest could not find it in his heart to put him out. He could only marvel at the faith of this gray, bearded cripple who had held himself sturdily there as though defying him to dislodge him. Surely the man deserved prayers and help and not a half-hearted attempt to pacify him.

Father Seelos had read the Gospel of St. John. Then, "I will kneel," he had said. "You sit here and pray, my friend. With the faith in your heart, the Lord cannot help but hear us."

When he had looked up, the man was crying. "Father Seelos, I am well. May God be praised. Watch me." And he had walked to the door. A husky man, walking straight as an arrow. At the door he had raised a hand in salute. "God be praised. Thank you, Father."

So now Father Seelos, in saving a crippled soul, was not surprised. "Go thy way. Thy faith has saved thee."

Which miracle was the greater?



... Father Vaughn has returned to the city and is now available to make his usual calls to hospitals in the New Orleans area and bless the sick with the mission crucifix of Father Seelos. Again we repeat should you have a relative or friend in a local hospital and wish Father Vaughn to bless them, kindly call 895-6176.

... The doubloon (or medallion) commemorating the centennial of Father Seelos death should be available shortly. The order has been given to the manufacturer to proceed with striking the coins. The price of the standard doubloon is \$1.00 each. For those who wish a more permanent and lasting memorial, a deluxe doubloon, manufactured from .999 silver, will be available for \$5.00 each. There will also be an issue of only 1,000 sets of five separate commemorative coins. This five coin set will be composed of the following types: aluminum, verbronz, .999 silver, oxidized silver and copper. This five coin set will undoubtedly become a collectors' item. They will be available at \$15.00 per set. You may order them now from the Seelos Center, 2030 Constance Street, New Orleans, La. 70130.

OCTOBER 4TH
MARKS THE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE DEATH OF FATHER SEELOS.
PLEASE WATCH THE NEWSLETTER FOR
FURTHER DETAILS AS TO ITS CELEBRATION.