

Seeing What We Are Believing:  
Holy Relics, a Journey of Faith, and Prolific Healing

*“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”*

**Saint Augustine**

When you are an earthly institution albeit divinely commissioned, like the Catholic Church, and have been in existence continually since the beginning of the first century A.D., you wind up collecting stuff ... lots of stuff. Some of them are temporal and essential, like churches, schools and hospitals. And some of them fall into a very special category of bridging the here and now, or rather the there and then, and the eternal. These are sacred relics.

Relics have been an integral part of the Catholic faith from the very beginning. One could argue the veneration and appreciation of relics began in the Old Testament as the bones of Elisha facilitated the return to life of a dead man who came into contact with them (2 Kings 13:20-21). In the New Testament we read of the hemorrhaging woman who only had to touch Jesus' garment to be cured of her affliction (Matthew 9:20-22), of how cloths touched to St. Paul healed and drove out demons (Acts 19:11-12), and how even St. Peter's shadow had healing power through the grace of God (Acts 5:12-15).

So for two thousand years, as empires rose up from ashes only to return to them over and over again, the Church has maintained an inventory of very special human objects. They have helped the faithful wrap their spiritual arms around God's personal

interest in his creatures, while at the same time they have served as true vehicles of spiritual and physical healing.

Companions of the Cross priest, Father Carlos Martins, has traveled around the country and beyond with very large collection of holy relics. He visits schools, parishes and even prisons from coast to coast bringing these incredible and holy links to the past which, by virtue of their vaulted spiritual significance, are tangible connections to God in the present.

The Companions of the Cross is a community of priests committed to living and ministering together as brothers in the Lord while participating in the ongoing renewal of the Church through a dynamic evangelization in the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. Their Sister Community, the Servants of the Cross, incarnates their spirituality and way of life in a community of woman.

Fr. Martins, by his membership in this community and through his own compelling personal story, is by temperament and vocation, a missionary. But his *modus operandi* couldn't be more unique as he uses a vast collection of saintly relics to educate, enlighten and inspire those who attend his expositions. The collection includes a huge fragment of the True Cross, a portion of the veil of our Blessed Mother, and relics from just about any saint you can name and many more that you can't. With these treasures, Fr. Martins tells captivating stories not only about the courageous men and women the Church has recognized as saints, but also about how their relics have affected people like you and me and changed lives forever through the gift of healing.

What we really have here though are two stories, for not only are there the stories that come with the relics, but those who attend these remarkable events also get Fr. Martins' own personal journey thrown in for free.

You see, this man, this Roman Catholic priest in possession of many holy fragments that tell the complete story of salvation from the Cross of Christ to present day martyrs, was, not that long ago, not only not a priest, but not a believer either.

Born in Ontario, Canada, Fr. Martins spent his first 12 years of school in Catholic schools. But with nominally Catholic parents and the fact that in all those twelve years, by his own admission, "I never encountered a saint," his faith never became viable. While he studied philosophy in university in Canada, he visited the possibility of a belief in God but always came away unconvinced. "When I wondered about the existence of God I was immediately confronted with that fact that, if an all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful God exists, why is there so much evil in the world? If you were God, would you permit evil in your world? If God exists, then why are there so many different religions that claim to know him, each with contradictory accounts of reality? If you were God, would you permit the multitude of religions that there are? And the big one, if God exists why does he hide himself? Why does he not just peel back the sky and reveal himself? Why does his existence have to be a secret? Think about it. If you were God, would you hide yourself?"

Fr. Martins is quick to point out that he never had an axe to grind against the Church or against theism in general. His conclusions were based on intellectual reasoning as honestly as he could achieve it. "The gap that these questions reveal were

proof to me that an all-knowing, all-good, all-powerful God does not exist. He simply cannot, or these states would not exist.” Just as quickly, however, he points out that he was not a “happy” atheist. “The conclusion I came to actually brought me to a state of profound sadness because I didn’t want this conclusion to be true. I knew the human creature is wired to want to believe in God, to want an afterlife. He wants to know that death is not going to be the end. The conclusion I had reached seemed like a sentence of living the rest of my life in a meaningless void.”

Fr. Martins had come to the same philosophical *cul-de-sac* that atheists, if they are honest with themselves, must confront and one he most certainly wrestled with. “If God doesn’t exist there is no meaning or purpose to reality. Period. Even the moment of one’s death will be unknown because consciousness will cease to exist. It’ll be lights out. I won’t even know when I die. But if this conclusion is true then what follows from that? Well, in a hundred years after I die, when everyone else who knew me is also dead, then I might as well never have existed. Without God, existence seems even less than purposeless.”

Though his primary Catholic education took place without contact from committed and faithful peers, mercifully, it was during Fr. Martins’ undergraduate career at St. Jerome’s College in the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, that things changed. He met some fellow students and professors who were strong and happy in their faith and invited him to join them for a Eucharistic Adoration retreat. And it was during April 26-28, 1996, that Carlos Martins’ life changed forever.

“In my first Eucharistic experience there was just me and the Lord and I felt like a fool who didn’t belong. Then the reality hit me ... I’d signed up for three days of this. So I sat there trying to calculate an early departure. After about a half hour it dawned on me that I couldn’t back out of this without it affecting tremendously the other people with whom I had come. There were six of us each spending four hours a day before Our Lord. If I left, the other five would have to pick up my hours. I did not want to ruin an experience for them to which they were kind enough to invite me.”

So he stayed, but not before making a deal with the God he still did not believe in. “After a long and painful silence, I got on my knees and said, ‘God, I don’t know if you exist or not. I do not believe you do. But *if* you do, please reveal yourself to me and I will give you my life.’” It may not have been as dramatic as being struck by white light on the road to Damascus, but something discernable transpired. Fr. Martins describes it as experiencing a sense of peace. “Or more likely, a thread of peace, but it was distinctive and it certainly cut through the fog. It wasn’t overwhelming, but it was palpable. So I got through my first shift.”

During the next shift, Fr. Martins describes that *thread* of peace transforming into a *rope* and the ease with which he got through the next hour surprised him. “And then, at the 3:00 am shift that rope had become a force which powerfully overwhelmed me. In speaking to the Eucharist, I intuitively knew that I was not just speaking to nothingness or an inanimate object, but I was conversing with the all-knowing, all-good, all-perfect God who understands me and who loves me. I was not speaking to a rock or a wall, but with a “Someone” who was receiving my communication and was

communicating back. I was being understood, and I was in turn understanding the communication that was being directed to me. And the depth of that communication was overwhelming. The peace it gave was the most incredible experience I had ever had. I was being loved by a love that was INFINITE.”

Buoyed by his new-found faith, Father Martins earned a graduate degree in Philosophy at the University of Toronto and then went on to obtain an education degree at the University of Ottawa. He also received two theology degrees from the Collège Dominicain.

But things were about to change forever ... again for Carlos Martins. He recalls the time and place with the accuracy and detail of a watch maker. For it was on Tuesday, June 3, 2003, at precisely 10:18 a.m., he heard God calling him. “I heard God’s voice telling me, ‘Carlos, join the Companions of the Cross and I promise to make you very happy.’” He heard, he listened, and in 2009, he was ordained.

*How does one go from atheism to belief, from belief to Holy Orders, and then on to acquiring such a large collection of holy relics?*

“You tell me and we’ll both know. I never set out to acquire a collection such as this. Everything has been Divine Providence through the appearance of just stumbling and pure luck. When I converted I went on a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Rome in 1997 and while there I befriended a student from the U.S. He had a Vatican connection to relics and he offered to gift me some. And that’s how it started. By the time I was ordained in 2009, my collection had grown to more than 2,000.”

*Where do the relics come from?*

“I get them primarily from churches and monasteries that have closed and are no longer using them, from priests and nuns who pass away and their families send their relic collections to me, or from postulators who are promoting the saints of their order or a particular blessed for whom the Church is awaiting one more miracle so as to grant a canonization.”

*What inspired you to take these relics “on the road” so to speak?*

“Just like everything else in my faith journey it ended up being a kind of surprise. I was living in a parish and I thought that since I had all these relics, it would be great for the catechesis of these people to expose them to relics. So I put together an exposition along with a catechesis, sort of on the fly. I thought I would get a few curious people. Instead, the exposition attracted an enormous crowd. It got me thinking. So a week later I took the exposition to a neighboring parish and the response was the same. I began to think that I stumbled onto something.”

*Why do you describe this ministry as a healing ministry?*

“Healing is what this ministry is all about. I do not have a traveling museum. If a collection of curiosities is all I had then I would be more useful as a parish priest. I begin each exposition with a presentation and teaching on relics and sainthood, and this provides the catechetical and spiritual basis for the *Walk with the Saints* which follows the presentation. The point of the teaching is nothing other than to present the basic

Gospel message of Jesus Christ: that God is here right now and wants to be encountered; He touches us through the lives and the sacred remains of His Saints. God never disappoints ... he always 'shows up'. There are healings at every exposition. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, have been reported to me. Spectacular ones. I have seen cancer, heart disease, tumors, osteoporosis, physical deformities, etc., disappear immediately and completely. Though a great number of miracles have been physical (my website lists a sample of these), the most spectacular are the healing of faith where a new and deeper relationship with God and His Saints are formed in the faithful. It is a most wonderful thing to see individuals, parishes, and schools renewed after an exposition. That is the reason why I have this ministry."

*What is the definition of a relic?*

"There are three kinds of relics: a first class relic is the body or fragments of the body of a Saint. A second class relic is something a Saint personally owned, such as like a piece of clothing or a book. A third class relic is an item a Saint touched or that has been touched to a first, second, or another third class relic of a Saint."

*Why does the Church venerate relics?*

"Relics are connected with the Holy Spirit. In the case of first class relics, they were temples of the Holy Spirit. In a mystical way, the Holy Spirit dwelt within them. *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from*

God. (1 Corinthians 6:19). And it was the great Church Father St. Jerome who said, "We venerate the relics of the martyrs in order to better adore Him whose martyrs they are."

*Are relics magic?*

"They are not magic. They do not contain a power that is their own; a power separate from God. Any good that comes about through a relic is God's doing. But the fact that God chooses to use the relics of Saints to work healing and miracles tells us that He wants to draw our attention to the Saints as models and intercessors."

*At your expositions you allow everyone to touch and hold the reliquaries. Why?*

Yes, everything is for touching. The reason is scriptural. In all the scriptural instances of relics effecting a healing, touch was the way it came about. My experience bears witness to this. Recently a man who was completely deaf came to an exposition in California and touched a reliquary to his ears. As he set it down and started to walk away he began to hear everything around him. His hearing was restored. The same occurred at an exposition in the Gulf Coast with a middle aged man who had never walked in his life. He was wheeled in on his wheelchair and, after the presentation, asked to be wheeled to one particular relic. After touching it and praying with it he got up and walked home. He no longer requires a wheelchair.

*Is there a particular relic in your collection with special meaning for you?*

"I have a relic of St. Maria Goretti. Her story inspired me the moment I heard it

and her relic is one of the very first that came into my possession. I got it from someone who wanted to sell it. I tried to convince this person that selling the relic was a mortal sin, listed in article 1190 of the Code of Canon Law. By the grace of God, I must have been convincing because he turned around and gave it to me along with 14 others.”

*Is there another reason this relic is more meaningful to you?*

“About a year ago Maria Goretti’s relic was involved in a miraculous healing of a man who had been bitten by a venomous spider. His infected arm was set to be amputated. I visited the man just hours before surgery and prayed with him and brought him the relic of St. Maria Goretti. His arm was overcome with necrosis. It was dead. In fact, I could see the black marker line the surgeons had drawn at the crown of the shoulder marking out where they would cut into the arm. I told him the story of St. Maria and touched his heavily bandaged arm with her relic. Thirty minutes before his scheduled operation, the medical team started prepping the man for surgery. The surgeons came in to coordinate among themselves the procedure of the surgery. They removed his bandaging. There was not a thing wrong with his arm. Nothing. No necrosis, no infection, no distress. They could not find a spider bite anywhere on his arm.”

“In truth, I knew that St. Maria’s was the relic to take. Her father had died from an insect bite and I knew that she would intervene. She did not let me down.”

You will learn all about the courageous and inspiring story of St. Maria Goretti if you are lucky enough to attend one of Fr. Carlos Martins' relic expositions. And if you do, you may also learn something about yourself and about your own personal faith journey, as you experience this unique healing ministry. For information about how your parish or school or other institution can arrange for a free exposition of these holy and remarkable relics, you can contact Fr. Carlos Martins through his website at [treasuresofthechurch.com](http://treasuresofthechurch.com)

For more information about the Companions of the Cross and the Servants of the Cross and how you might support the good work they do, visit their websites at [companionscross.org](http://companionscross.org) and [servantsofthecross.ca](http://servantsofthecross.ca).

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