

Religious relics have long tradition

By GRANT SASEK
IR Staff Writer

The reverence for relics is a phenomenon that reaches far beyond Catholicism or Christianity. In Asia, strands of hair and teeth from Buddha are carefully preserved and enshrined in pagodas. In Jerusalem, two hairs of the prophet Mohammed are kept in a reliquary called the Dome of the Rock. In China, the relics of Confucius have been venerated every year since 195 B.C.

THE RANKING OF RELICS in the Christian faith comes from a long tradition and is specific about which relics rank where.

Officially, relics are divided into three categories: first, second and third class relics. First-class relics are parts of the bodies of saints and the instruments of Jesus' suffering and death. The remains of a saint or holy person have been referred to as relics since the early days of the church. The word comes from the Latin word *reliquiae*, which means remains. Second-class relics are objects that were within close contact of saints, such as clothing. Third-class relics are objects or cloths touched by either first or second class relics.

THE SEARCH FOR RELICS is a

search filled with some certainty, many questions and much faith. Authorities are confident that some of the most sought-after Christian relics have been found. Other objects claiming to be significant relics may or may not be. Some relics still are the unfound focus of centuries of quests. According to Joan Carroll Cruz, author of "Relics," a few of the more significant relics and where they may be include:

■ **The Holy Manger.** Five boards, blackened with age, that are held in a gold and silver reliquary in the Basilica of St. Mary in Rome are believed to be from the crib of Bethlehem. It is believed that the boards were

brought from the Holy Land to the basilica by Pope Theodore during the 640s.

■ **The Swaddling Cloth.** The cloth believed to have been worn by the baby Jesus is held in a golden reliquary in a shrine in Aachen, Germany. The shrine is in a cathedral built by Charlemagne while Aachen was capital of the Holy Roman Empire. The cloth is publicly displayed on the average of once every seven years.

■ **The Holy Grail.** The stuff of crusades, quests and, many years later, movies. This much seems to be clear: After Joseph of Arimathea gathered

Christ's blood during the crucifixion, either he or one of his relatives carried the goblet to England, where it was lost. Today, there are at least four goblets people claim to be the grail. One of those cups is in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was discovered in Syria in 1910 during a severe drought. The cup actually is two cups — an elaborate outer cup of carved silver surrounding a plain inner cup of very old silver. Scholars theorize that the costly outer shell was added sometime after Jesus' death to protect the grail — the plain silver cup inside. Another cup with claims to being the grail is held at the Cathedral of Valencia.

Saints

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St. Maurice was an early Christian soldier whose martyrdom sparked the birth of a cult still practiced today. St. Vincent is honored during a feast every Jan. 22 for dying for his faith in Christ in about the year 300. When the shards of their bones were brought into the Cathedral and placed in the altar during the church's consecration on June 3, 1924, it was done with much ceremony — right down to mixing the cement with holy water.

ACCORDING TO the July, 1924 edition of The Helena Catholic Monthly, during the cathedral's day-long consecration, the relics were carried to the altar in a procession "headed by two acolytes bearing lighted candles. The came a crossbearer, followed by the clergy, singing. Then came the priests carrying the bier with the relics, this immediately preceded by a thurifer continually incensing the relics, and by two torch bearers; next the Bishop, fully vested, with his attendants. An antiphon was intoned as the procession proceeded."

After song and prayer, after the relics were placed in the altar's hollowed space, Bishop John Thien cemented the altar stone into the altar.

ST HELENA'S RELICS

The relics of the saints held in the vault also are treated with much respect. Pieces of bone, ranging from pebble-sized to some so small they are barely visible to the naked eye, are held in small, round brass containers lined with red velvet and covered with glass. Most of the containers just hold the remains of one saint, with the name painted onto the velvet. In the backs, wax seals from the church verify their authenticity. One container holds a tiny piece of bone with the name "St. Helenae" carefully painted on it.

THE SHRED OF bone from St. Helena and the others are held inside two ornate reliquaries. Painted in gold on the red wooden boxes is Latin, when roughly translated, according to Hale, means "Saints of God, intercede and pray for us." The reliquaries rest in the vault with the chalice used to consecrate

the cathedral more than 50 years ago, the robe Bishop Carroll wore to the ceremony and other, more contemporary "relics." The church celebrates many of its saints with annual feasts, including a feast to St. Helena in August, but even then, the relics remain in the vault. "They have been taken out, but not in my time," Hale said. The reasons for that are "more of a practical than religious thing," Hale said.

BECAUSE OF THEIR importance, if they were displayed at special times, they couldn't just be set on a shelf or in a corner. "They would have to have their own space," Hale said. Unfortunately, but perhaps more importantly, there is another, more base reason. "They are very valuable to the church," Hale said. "They should be kept safe."

VERENATION, NOT IDOLIZATION

When people pray in the Cathedral of St. Helena, they are there worshipping God — not the saints, Hale said. "We don't worship saints," Hale said. "But we do see them as people to imitate because they imitated Christ. They are part of the community of faith." Saints also are considered to be "a vehicle to Christ" and prayers are made to specific saints to intercede on people's behalf.

FOR EXAMPLE, Hale said. St. Anthony is a popular saint to pray to when something is lost. St. Francis also is a popular saint because of his care for the poor. Simply, saints are considered to be holy, Hale said. Their relics left behind are tangible pieces of that holiness, he added. "Relics and pilgrimages are ways to satisfy a human need to touch the holy," Hale said.

Sources for this article include "Wonders of Rome," "Catholic Book of Knowledge," "Relics," "The Cathedral of Saint Helena" and "The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary."

Relics and pilgrimages are ways to satisfy a human need to touch the holy.

Tornadoes

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Kentucky late Friday, killing two people. Violent thunderstorms also caused scattered damage Friday in Indiana.

All but five units of the Hickory Trace Townhomes in Chattanooga were leveled, and even those standing will have to be pulled down, developer Coleman Hockman said after touring the site.

The second floors of the townhomes were gone and most facades were ripped away. Yellow paint marked buildings where rescuers and dogs had searched for possible victims pinned underneath debris.

"It will take us a couple of days to account for everybody," said Fire Chief Jim Coppinger. "It's not the best of circumstances with the debris, people leaving on their own and it being Easter weekend and people out of town."

Two of the injured were in critical condition, Womack said. At least 44 people were treated for cuts and bruises.

Power was out most of the day for about 20,000 customers. Some of the worst damage was at the 180-unit Hickory Villa

Apartments in Chattanooga, where about half of the units were demolished. Vehicles parked at the complex were picked up and dropped 300 feet away — on the other side of 45-foot-tall buildings.

The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency said 12 tornadoes touched down shortly after midnight. Property damage was reported in 12 counties.

Eric Wilson said he and his wife were getting ready to go to bed when they heard hail striking their mobile home. "And then we heard the wind. My wife and I hit the floor and pulled the mattress on top of us. And then (the trailer) was just gone."

In Kentucky, at least five twisters were reported in six rural counties, the National Weather Service said. The storms injured 26 people, damaged or destroyed nearly 150 homes and downed power lines, state officials said. Two people were killed.

Marsha Cook's mobile home in south-central Kentucky tumbled 600 feet away from its foundation while she and her three children hid in her mother's basement five miles away.

"They had to bring in a front-



Clara Ellis, left, comforts Amy Pendleton, center, Saturday in Cane Valley, Ky. The two women were assisting in cleanup efforts at a relative's house, the side of which had been pulled away by the force of the tornado that came through the community Friday.

end loader to carry it off the road," she said. "All that was intact was the floor. Everything else was just twisted and destroyed."

Thunderstorms and a tornado hit Indiana late Friday, ripping roofs off an apartment complex and

causing heavy damage. No serious injuries were reported.

"I got out of my car... and I went flying around from the driver's side to the passenger's side," said Judy Humphreys, 50, of Indianapolis.

New governmental crisis looms in Albania

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — President Sali Berisha's party threatened to pull out of the caretaker government Saturday, accusing its coalition partners of inciting violence by signing a joint declaration with insurgents.

Nine more people were reported dead in the violence and chaos that have convulsed the Balkan nation since investors' anger over failed investment schemes turned this month into armed rebellion.

On Friday, the U.N. Security Council approved sending a force into Albania to protect foreign relief efforts. In addition to violence, the country also faces a food shortage.

Earlier, all major opposition parties signed the declaration, drafted by the insurgents, which called for Berisha's removal through peaceful means.

Berisha's Democratic Party called an emergency meeting with Premier Bashkim Fino of the rival Socialist Party and other opposition leaders. The ruling party warned it would withdraw from the coalition.

WORLD

"The Democratic Party reminds all the political forces in the country that political cooperation with the (insurgents') committees and agreements with them are an unjustifiable incitement to street violence and they will help prolong terrorism in the country," the party said in a statement.

Parliamentary speaker Pjeter Arbnor, a Berisha ally, warned the opposition parties' signing of the rebel declaration could lead to political gridlock. Berisha's party controls parliament and already has blocked several pieces of proposed legislation put forward by the coalition government.

Lawmakers scheduled a special session Sunday to formally approve the deployment of the international force and debate the rebel declaration.

Meanwhile, VEFA, one of the few pyramid schemes that did not completely fall apart, sought to reassure investors late Saturday

with a television ad in which it promised to repay their capital. The ad did not say when the repayments would begin.

Nearly 200 people have died and hundreds have been injured since the violence began in January. Thousands of Albanians have fled the troubles, crossing the Adriatic Sea on rickety boats to Italy.

On Friday, an Italian warship collided with an Albanian coast guard patrol boat carrying 800

be refugees, and the boat sank. Four bodies were recovered and 34 Albanians were rescued from the Adriatic. There was little hope of finding other survivors in the rough seas.

The number of passengers was still unclear. Port and police authorities estimated there were between 45 and 70 people aboard, while some of the survivors spoke of anywhere from 70 to 150 passengers.

Italian authorities arrested the boat's captain, Xhaser Namik, 45, and charged him with aiding illegal immigration for monetary gain, the AGI news agency reported.

LOTTERY

The winning numbers drawn Saturday night in "Powerball" are: 3-23-29-35-42. Powerball 2. Estimated jackpot: \$5 million.

Here are Saturday's winning numbers in the Tri-West Lotto lottery game: 8-22-27-28-29-33. Estimated jackpot: \$175,000.

Here are Saturday's winning numbers in the Montana Cash lottery game: 11-15-20-24-26. Estimated jackpot: \$40,000.

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