

## **Relics We Hold Dear**

by Victoria Ries

A few years ago, I was one of the presenters for the annual Novena of Grace sponsored by the Ignatian Spirituality Center in Seattle. After each Mass, there was time for individual prayer with one of the presenters or staff from the Ignatian Spirituality Center, each of whom held a small case holding the relic of a Jesuit saint.

A friend from graduate school, Mary Lane Potter, a co-author in this series, attended the Novena on one of the days that I preached. She asked me about the tradition of relics in the Catholic Church. Though I had grown up Catholic and had served in parish ministry in the Catholic Church for thirty-five years and had earned a doctorate in theology, I had not given much thought to relics in many years.

I am not sure what I said on that day when asked about relics, but Mary came forward to me at the time of prayer, and we prayed, both holding the relic of St. Francis Xavier, one of the good friends and first followers of St. Ignatius.

Thus was planted the seed in Mary's mind for this trinity of articles—and my growing recognition of and appreciation for the relics that I hold dear.

Perhaps it is easiest to understand relics if we consider our own lives. We all have relics, but we may not, at first, describe them as relics. My mother recently died. In the last weeks of her life, she prayed the rosary regularly and even slept with her rosary. I now have that rosary in a place of honor beside my bed. When I see it and touch it, I think of my mother—and remember and give thanks. She and her strong faith are present to me now through her rosary. When I use her rosary to pray I am touching the beads that she touched and prayed, and my own faith is strengthened by her faith.

A good friend of mine from graduate school died too young. He had written a book, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*. When I hold his book and read his note to me, I remember him, his faith, his love for God, and I give thanks. He is the person who taught me to pray more deeply. When we were graduate

students, we would often pray together. I learned from him to pray each day and throughout the day. More significantly, he taught me to enter into intimacy with God in prayer and in everyday life. When I pray, he continues to be part of my life in the same way he was when he was alive—inviting me to an always deepening intimacy with and love of God.

A woman I knew well and admired greatly from my parish work died a couple months ago. She was a person who was very humble and full of love. When she entered a room, love entered and abounded. She was the most loving person I have ever met. Her love and reverence for every person—from her beloved husband to her family and friends to parishioners to people she just met to strangers—was palpable and inspiring. As I was preparing to write this article, I opened a book and found a relic from her.

Immediately, I was aware of love. It was a Christmas card that she had made a couple years ago. The front side of the card read: "Throw kindness around like confetti. It's the little things we do that make all the difference." Every time I see the card, and I now keep it in a prominent place, I remember her, but even more, I remember her love. And that is the gift she continues to bring in my life, and that I hope and strive to bring to others.

None of these "saints" will be beatified by the Catholic Church. The relics I have from them will likely not be passed from generation to generation and become worldwide objects of veneration. But these saints are among the "All Saints" we celebrate every November on All Saints Day—known mainly to their families and friends. The relics we treasure from their time with us are not only a reminder to us of them and their love and faith but an invitation to our greater love and faith.

And that, I think, is the purpose of a relic—to invite us to live with the same faithfulness and love of those who have gone before us and whose relics we cherish and whose love we seek to share and pass on.