

Sisters of Loretto have historic relics

BY DENNIS GEORGE
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

Father Pier Giorgio Dengler thinks religious relics should be displayed so the faith of believers can be reinforced.

It made even more sense when those artifacts were located in one of the most Roman Catholic communities in Kentucky.

Dengler was speaking to Reba Weatherford, the archivist at the Heritage Center at the Sisters of Loretto Motherhouse, when she mentioned there were a number of boxes there full of various items.

"There were religious articles that were not yet recognized as relics but somebody had clearly set them aside for that purpose," Fr. Dengler said. "I told Reba that if you have something like this, it should be displayed for people to see."

Even though it took some long hours to sort through the hundreds upon hundreds of relics, they were able to display many of them on Nov. 1, the day celebrated in the Catholic Church as All Saints Day. It was a quiet group of people who walked from display to display, reading the cards in front of each one describing their importance. Included in the displays were a sliver of the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified, a piece of clothing from the Blessed Virgin Mary, and bones of St. Peter, the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church, and St. Paul.

Fr. Dengler also explained how the relics were verified.

"With the more famous saints, we are more reliably able to do that," he said. "People knew of Jesus and Mary and St. Peter and knew they were very important. Think about celebrities today. For example, is that really Elvis' guitar or did George Washington really sleep here? Those records are easily verified. It is more reliable for some of those big-name relics as opposed to the lesser-known saints. If it was someone less important, why would it be kept?"

Researchers have looked at the relics of the true cross and figured out what it would be like if they were all put together.

"It was determined that they would be a cross that would support a person who was hung from it," Fr. Dengler said.

There are three types of relics, he noted, with the first class being a piece of a saint, usually a bone, skin, or hair. The second class belonged to a saint, such as a piece of clothing. The third is something touched to a first-class relic. This could be a rosary or a medal touched to a saint's relic.

A relic must be endorsed by a bishop and sealed to prevent tampering and are for edification of the faithful. There is a martyr's relic on every altar in a Catholic church.

Fr. Dengler, a Dominican



DENNIS GEORGE/Paxton Media Group

Father Pierre Dengler touches his rosary to a relic that was on display Nov. 1 at the Loretto Motherhouse Heritage Center. The act made his rosary a Class 3 relic.



This wooden crucifix has an opening in the center to hold a relic. It features a carved figure of God the Father and the Holy Spirit and a dove at the top. The Virgin Mary is at the bottom. This was one of several relics recently on display at the Sisters of Loretto Heritage Center.

priest at the St Rose Priory in Springfield, has always been enamored with the saints.

"They have been important in my own faith and in my journey to the Dominicans, like St. Dominic," he said.

Currently, there are no plans for another showing of the relics.



Bones of St. Peter and St. Paul were on display recently at the Sisters of Loretto Heritage Center.

"This is not necessarily a one-time thing, but we may be looking at more one-day exhibits of other things in our collection," said Weatherford, the archivist at the Motherhouse.

A large number of relics were on display Nov. 1 at the Sisters of Loretto Heritage Center. Some were so small that a magnifying glass was needed to pick them out.

