

find icons of holy bishops, especially the authors of our two Anaphoras, Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom. On the western wall it is customary to depict the Dormition of the Mother of God or the Fearful (Last) Judgment. These icons at the exit of the church remind us that we are to think of the end of our earthly life in light of the Mother of God's blessed Dormition, totally offering ourselves into the hands of the Lord, or—if it is the Fearful (Last) Judgment—to be ready to answer before God for the life we are living. In the narthex we frequently find an icon of Christ's Crucifixion. A church thus filled with icons is truly a sobor, an assembled gathering of the entire Church.

## **2. Veneration of Saints' Relics**

615 At funerals, the Church shows respect to the body of every deceased person. She shows particular respect to the bodies of the righteous who have been glorified (canonized as saints). When during his or her earthly life a righteous person grows in sanctity, the grace of God that he or she receives transforms not only their soul but also their body. The body that subjects itself to the soul and together with the soul strives for sanctity is also glorified after death. During the general resurrection and into eternity, a person takes part in communing with God in his or her glorified body. Relics are the remains of a deceased Christian whom the Church has numbered among the choir of saints.

616 As the body of Christ shone in the Transfiguration, and his garment was a source of healing for the woman suffering from a haemorrhage (see Mt 17:2; 9:20) and as healing came through the shadow of Peter

' and the handkerchief of Paul (see Acts 5:15; 19:12), so also, after their death, the bodies of saints—and even objects they used—can transmit the grace of healing and strengthen in faith as well as sustain in their ascetic efforts those who venerate them in faith. Saint John Chrysostom teaches: "God shared the martyrs with us. He took to himself their souls and left their bodies to us so that their holy bones might remind us continually of their virtues."<sup>423</sup> And again: "The relics of the holy martyrs cast away the evil demons. The devils tremble not only before the Crucified One, but also before the relics of those who gave their life for him."<sup>424</sup>

617 In Ukrainian the word for relics (moshchi), which designates the bodily remains of a righteous person (whether incorruptible or not), comes from the Slavonic moshch, meaning strength or power. It expresses the

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<sup>423</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Encomium to Julian Martyr*, 4: PG 50, 672.

<sup>424</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Encomium to the Holy Apostle Paul, Homily*, 4: PG 50, 490.

wondrous power of God's life in the frailty of human death. Holy Scripture mentions the miracle of God's power by which a dead man was brought back to life through the relics of God's prophet Elisha (see 2 Kgs 13:21). Christians venerated the relics of saints from early centuries, in particular when on the graves of martyrs, they celebrated the Eucharist, which unites the living and the dead. These places, together with the buried relics, were considered holy—more precious than gold or jewels.

Who would allow me to touch the body of Paul, accost his tomb and see the remains of his body? I much desire to see the remains of those lips by means of which Christ proclaimed such great and ineffable mysteries; to see the remains of his hands that were put in chains; to see the remains of his eyes that were blinded and saw again for the salvation of the world; to see the remains of those feet that journeyed throughout the world and were not exhausted<sup>425</sup>

618 The tradition of celebrating the Divine Liturgy over the relics of the saints lives on in the Church. During the consecration of an altar, relics are mounted into it, and on it is placed an antimimension (from the Greek, meaning instead of a table). The antimimension is a cloth with an image of Christ being laid in the grave with relics sewn into it and signed by the local bishop. This special cloth is a symbol of the communion of the priest and the community with their bishop. Therefore, the Liturgy is not celebrated without it. There exists also a pious custom of placing relics or objects that the saints used during their lives into their icons." The Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 solemnly confirmed the tradition of venerating relics along with the tradition of venerating icons. "The Lord glorifies the relics of martyrs in different ways: some are incorruptible, others stream forth myrrh (for example, the relics of Saint Nicholas, the great-martyr Demetrius, and many venerable Fathers of the Kyivan-Caves Monastery). The Church sometimes venerates also instruments of martyrdom, for example, the chains of the apostle Peter (January 16/29).

619 Christians attributed great significance to finding the relics of a saint or their transfer to a permanent place of deposition. Such an event, example, was the finding in Khersones of Crimea of the relics of bishop-martyr Clement, Pope of Rome (commemorated November 25/December 8). The transfer of a part of these relics to Rome by Saint Cyril in the ninth century and a part of them to Kyiv by Saint Volodymyr in the tenth century were also significant events. The relics of Saint

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425 JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, Selections from Various Homilies: Homily 30 - In Praise of Saint Paul  
PG 63, 798.