

Jim's Notes
February 28, 2007
Acts 19:12

In the Bible also, as in Church history, we learn that animate things are instruments of Divine power, not because they have any excellence in themselves, but through a special relation to God. Thus we distinguish holy relics, e.g., the mantle of Elijah (II Kings 2), the body of Elisha (II Kings 13:21), the hem of Christ's garment (Matthew 9), the handkerchiefs of St. Paul (Acts 19:12); holy images, e.g., the brazen serpent (Numbers 21) holy things, e.g., the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred vessels of the Temple (Daniel 5); holy places, e.g., the Temple of Jerusalem (II Chronicles 6:7), the waters of the Jordan (II Kings 5), the Pool of Bethesda (John 5).

Miracles worked by God through objects such as the handkerchiefs in Acts 19:12 are not magic.

Origin addressed this subject in answer to the objections of the pagan philosopher Celsus: "Did the disciples of Jesus learn to do miracles and thereby convince their hearers, or did they not do any? It is quite absurd to say that they did not do any miracles of any kind, and that, in blind faith . . . they went off everywhere to propagate a new teaching: for what would have kept their spirits up when they had to teach something which was so completely new? But if they did also work miracles, how on earth could these magicians have faced so many dangers to spread a teaching which explicitly forbade the use of magic?" (Against Celsus 1:38)

St. Ambrose wrote to his sister that, while he was moving the relics of the martyrs Sts. Gervasius and Protasius to the basilica, in AD 386, a blind man was healed. "They (the Arians) deny that the blind man received sight, but he does not deny that he is healed. He says: I who could not see now see. He says: I ceased to be blind, and proves it by the fact. They deny the benefit, who are unable to deny the fact. The man is known: so long as he was well he was employed in the public service; his name is Severus, a butcher by trade. . . He declares that when he touched the hem of the robe of the martyrs, wherewith the sacred relics were covered, his sight was restored. (St. Ambrose, Epistle 22)

St. Augustine gives an account of this same event:

"Then you did by a vision discover to your forenamed Bishop (St. Ambrose) where the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius the martyrs lay hid (whom you had in your secret treasury stored uncorrupted so many years), from where you might seasonably produce them to repress the fury of a woman, but an Empress (who was an Arian). For when they were discovered and dug up, and with due honor translated to the Ambrosian Basilica, not only they who were vexed with unclean spirits (the devils confessing themselves) were cured, but a certain man who had for many years been blind, a citizen, and well known to the city, asking and hearing the reason of the people's confused joy, sprang forth desiring his guide

to lead him to the place. Led there, he begged to be allowed to touch with his handkerchief the bier of your saints, whose death is precious in your sight. Which when he had done, and put to his eyes, they were immediately opened. From there the fame spread, from there your praises glowed, shone; from there the mind of that enemy (the Arian empress), though not turned to the soundness of believing, was yet turned back from her fury of persecuting.” (St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions 9:16)