

Hundreds flock to honour relic of Little Flower - Friday, 02 October 2009



Hundreds of people flocked to two services in St Patrick's Church, Dumbarton, on Thursday (October 1) to honour the memory of St Therese of Liseux -- and to venerate a recently rediscovered rare relic of the saint.

The relic, a tiny piece of bone, was displayed in a gold monstrance in the imposing sanctuary of the Strathleven Place church to mark the feast day of St Therese, who is known as the Little Flower and has always held a special place in the hearts of many of the parishioners.

For more than a century since the church opened, candles lit by people saying their prayers there, have burned constantly before the saint's shrine.

Canon Gerry Conroy, the parish priest, said the relic of St Therese had been in the possession of the Carmelite nuns whose enclosed convent has been a secluded mansion at Helenslee Road in Kirktonhill, Dumbarton, for 75 years.

The relic was given to them many years ago by a Carmelite priest. It remained in their possession in relative secrecy until its existence was revealed by chance recently to Canon Conroy by the convent superior. There is only one other such relic in Scotland, at the Marian Shrine in Carfin, Lanarkshire.

The Canon had been discussing with the nuns the fact that the relics of St Therese were being brought from France to England and Wales for veneration by many thousands of people who would travel to see them in churches and cathedrals.

Canon Conroy said: "Sister Theresa, who is in charge at Dumbarton Carmel, revealed that a relic was there at their convent and told me its history.

"We decided to put it on display in St Patrick's where people could venerate the relic and receive a special blessing on the saint's feast day.

"Our intention was to pray for vocations to the priesthood during the Year of the Priest and for women to join the Carmelite Order, whose numbers have greatly diminished through lack of vocations in recent years."

He added: "We are very fortunate -- indeed we have been greatly blessed -- by the discovery of this relic of St Therese. Wherever the saint's relics have gone, there has been a sense of blessing, of holiness and the presence of God.

"Many people's hearts have been touched in the presence of these relics and they have helped people who had lost their faith to rediscover it and to find answers to their prayers.

"St Patrick's has been given a long-term loan of it and the relic will be placed on display in the church for veneration from time to time.

"It has also been decided to offer households in the parish an opportunity to host a statue of St Therese together with the relic for a week.

“Various other items – books, DVDs and CDs about the saint’s life - will also be included in the pack families will receive to help them in their journey of faith.”

Hundreds of people of all ages attended the two Masses in honour of St Therese in St Patrick’s. Roses were blessed and brought to the altar by members of the congregation and the homily at the evening Mass was preached by Father John Hughes, a Carmelite priest from Glasgow. Meanwhile, other relics of St Therese are currently being taken on a tour of churches and cathedrals in England and Wales. This tour is ongoing and will end on October 16.

To date the relics have visited nearly 40 countries around the world, including Brazil, Russia, Kazakhstan, the United States, Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Lebanon and Iraq.