

INCORRUPT RELICS



**The body of Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, found to be incorrupt by the Catholic Church.
(b. January 7, 1844 – d. April 16, 1879).**

Over the past few months while I have been compiling the Saint of the Day for the Knights of the Order, I have had many questions and comments sent me. One of the most recurring comments is the finding of a saint's buried body incorruptible. I have been asked how this can happen, as it is outside of the normal decaying processes.

Quite frankly, I did not have an answer, so I just ignored attempting answer that question.

The easy answer would be to indicate that we need to place our faith in God. If He wanted a saint to be incorruptible after their death, then it was left in God's hands. After all, who are we to explain the mysteries of God? I understood that the people asking the question were believers, and all from North America. In North America, we do not have much of a tradition that incorporates local saints in our daily worship. Except for a very few American saints, all of our saints are from Europe and only one that I am aware of from our local saints have been found incorruptible. Without this history of incorruptible saints, it is easy to understand the questions of even strong believers. We in North America have been taught that science is the answer to life, and the mysteries of God have been replaced by science in our daily lives.

In October, I read a newspaper article of shoes washing up on the beaches of Washington State. What was interesting was that the foot was still in the shoes. Speculation was that they were from the Japanese Tsunami, but there were recorded cases of feet washing ashore in shoes years before Fukushima. The article went on to explain how this could happen. In the ocean, particularly in oxygen-starved environments, is the build-up of adipocere around a body. Adipocere is a waxy substance, often found in soap. It builds up in bodies that are exposed to bacteria, but not to air. The anaerobic bacteria process the fat tissue and create adipocere.

Adipocere, also known as corpse, grave or mortuary wax, as it is a wax-like organic substance formed by the anaerobic bacterial hydrolysis of fat in tissue, such as body fat in corpses. In its

formation, putrefaction is replaced by a permanent firm cast of fatty tissues, internal organs and the face. Depending on whether it was formed from white or brown body fat, adipocere is grayish white or tan in color.

The transformation of fats into adipocere occurs best in the absence of oxygen in a hot and humid environment, such as in wet ground or mud at the bottom of a lake or a sealed casket, and it can occur with both embalmed and untreated bodies. Adipocere formation begins within a month of death, and in the absence of air it can persist for centuries. Adipoceros formation preserved the left hemisphere of the brain of a 13th-century infant such that sulci, gyri, and even Nissl bodies in the motor cortex could be distinguished in the 20th century. An exposed, infested body or a body in a warm environment is unlikely to form deposits of adipocere.

Corpses of women, infants and overweight persons are particularly prone to adipocere transformation because they contain more body fat. In forensic science, the utility of adipocere formation to estimate the postmortem interval is limited because the speed of the process is temperature-dependent. It is accelerated by warmth, but temperature extremes impede it.

So what apparently happened was that the saint was placed in an airtight body wrap or placed in a sealed coffin that allowed the formation of adipocere which in turn allowed the body shape and facial features to be covered by adipocere. When the curious unearthed the body of the saint, they saw what to them was a well-preserved body.

To the Orthodox Church, incorruptibility continues to be an important element for the process of glorification. An important distinction is

made between natural mummification and what is believed to be supernatural incorruptibility. There are a great number of Orthodox saints whose bodies have been found to be incorrupt and are in much veneration among the faithful. These include:

Anthony, John, and Eustathios

Saint Alexander of Svir — *the incorrupt relics of the saint were removed from the Svir Monastery by the Bolsheviks on December 20, 1918 after several unsuccessful attempts to confiscate them. Finally, the holy relics were sent to Petrograd's Military Medical Academy. There they remained for nearly eighty years. A second uncovering of St Alexander's relics took place in December 1997, before their return to the Svir Monastery.*

Saint Dmitry of Rostov

Saint Job of Pochayiv

Saint John the Russian

Saint John (Maximovich) of San Francisco and Shanghai, Wonder-Worker - *He was the Archbishop of San Francisco and Western*

America in San Francisco. His incorrupt relics are in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia Cathedral of the Mother of God (Theotokos) "Joy of All Who Sorrow" since his death in 1966 and was placed in a special crypt in the cathedral. He was canonized in 1994. While he was a ROCOR (Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia) Archbishop, the Russian and Serbian churches have all accepted him, and even today you can enter Greek and Antiochian churches and see his icon displayed. He was and still is a very popular American saint and theologian, much loved and venerated, much quoted and much considered an active wonder-worker.

Saint Ioasaph of Belgorod — *In 1918 the Bolsheviks removed Saint Ioasaph's relics from his shrine in the cathedral of the Holy Trinity at Belgorod, and for some seventy years their whereabouts remained unknown. In 1927 the cathedral itself was demolished. In*

the late 1980s the relics were discovered in Leningrad's Museum of Religion and Atheism, and on 16 September 1991 they were solemnly returned to the new Cathedral of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Belgorod, in the presence of Patriarch Alexy II.

Saint Nectarios of Aegina

Saint Parascheva of the Balkans

Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Saint Spyridon

Dionysios of Zakynthos

Gerasimus of Kefalonia

Saint Zosima

Saint Elizabeth

***NOTABLE ORTHODOX AND ROMAN SAINTS WHO'S
BODY REMAINEDS INCORRUPTIBLE***

- **Saint Agatha**
- **Saint Agnes of Montepulciano**
- **Saint Albert the Great**
- **Saint Alphege of Canterbury**
- **Saint Alphonse Mary of Liguori**
- **Saint Andrew Bobola**
- **Saint Angela Merici**
- **Saint Anthony Maria Zaccaria**
- **Saint Antoninus**
- **Saint Benedict the Moor**
- **Saint Benezet**
- **Saint Bernadette Soubirous**
- **Saint Bernardine of Siena**
- **Saint Camillus de Lellis**
- **Saint Catherine Labouré**
- **Saint Catherine of Bologna**

- **Saint Catherine of Genoa**
- **Saint Catherine de Ricci**
- **Saint Catherine of Siena**
- **Saint Charbel Makhlef**
- **Saint Charles Borromeo**
- **Saint Cecilia**



- **Saint Clare of Assisi**
- **Saint Clare of Montefalco**
- **Saint Coloman**
- **Saint Cuthbert**
- **Saint Diego of Alcalá**
- **Saint Dominic Savio**
- **Saint Edmund Rich of Canterbury**
- **Saint Edward the Confessor**
- **Saint Etheldreda**
- **Saint Eustochia Calafato**
- **Saint Frances of Rome**
- **Saint Francis de Sales**

The body of Saint Clare of Assisi

- **Saint Francis Xavier**
- **Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini**
- **Saint George Preca**
- **Saint Germaine Cousin**
- **Saint Guthlac**
- **Saint Annibale Maria di Francia**
- **Saint Herculanus of Piegaro**
- **Saint Hugh of Lincoln**
- **Saint Idesbald**
- **Blessed Imelda Lambertini**
- **Saint Isidore the Farmer**
- **Saint Jane Frances de Chantal**



- **Saint John-Mary-Baptist Vianney** **The body of Saint John Mary Vianney**
- **Saint Jeanne de Lestonnac**
- **Saint Joaquina de Vedruna**
- **Saint John Bosco**

- **Saint John Neumann**
- **Saint John of God**
- **Saint John of the Cross**
- **Saint John Southworth**
- **Saint Josaphat**
- **Saint Julie Billiart**
- **Saint Louis Bertrand**
- **Saint Louise de Marillac**
- **Saint Luigi Orione**
- **Saint Lucy Filippini**
- **Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat**
- **Blessed Mafalda of Portugal**
- **Saint Margaret of Cortona**
- **Venerable Mary of Jesus of Ágreda**
- **Venerable María de León Bello y Delgado**
- **Saint Maria Goretti**
- **Saint Martin de Porres**
- **Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi**
- **Blessed Mary of the Divine Heart^[7]**
- **Saint Narcisa de Jesús**
- **Saint Nicholas of Tolentino**
- **Saint Pacifico of San Severino**
- **Saint Paula Frassinetti**
- **Saint Pascal Baylon**
- **Saint Peregrine Laziosi**
- **Saint Philip Neri**
- **Saint Pierre Julien Eymard**



- **Saint Pio of Pietrelcina** **The body of Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina**
- **Saint Rafael Guízar Valencia**
- **Saint Rita of Cascia**
- **Saint Romuald**
- **Saint Rose of Lima**
- **Saint Rose of Viterbo**
- **Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne**
- **Saint Silvan**
- **Saint Sperandia**
- **Saint Stanislaus Kostka**
- **Saint Teresa of Ávila**
- **Saint Teresa Margaret of the Sacred Heart (Anna Maria Redi)**
- **Saint Therese of the Child Jesus**
- **Saint Ubald of Gubbio**
- **Saint Veronica Giuliani**
- **Saint Vincent de Paul**
- **Saint Vincent Pallotti**



- **Saint Virginia Centurione** **The body of Saint Virginia Centurione**
- **Saint Waltheof**
- **Saint Werburgh**
- **Saint Withburga**
- **Saint Wunibald**
- **Saint Zita**

Remember what Saint Paul said in his book to the Hebrews. “*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*”

So I give you a deep theological concept: ‘If God wanted a Saint's body to be Incorruptible, He would make the Saint Incorruptible. All we need is Faith in God's Divine Plan.’