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### Local - The Arizona Daily Star

#### Crucifixion relics set for 3-day state tour

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Fri Jan 14, 3:40 AM ET

By *Stephanie Innes*, Arizona Daily Star

Remains of what some believe were the crown of thorns and a splinter from the cross used in Jesus Christ's crucifixion will be in Southern Arizona next month as part of a touring exhibit of Catholic artifacts called "Relics of the Passion."

"We are expecting a lot of people. Catholics in Arizona are very devout, and in our troubled times right now people are really looking to get into the deep roots of their faith and to recapture a sense of hope," said John Garcia, public relations director for the Arizona Knights of Columbus.

The lay Catholic group and the Los Angeles-based Apostolate for Holy Relics, a nonprofit organization that operates under the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, are bringing the exhibit to Arizona Feb. 10-13.

The exhibit will feature eight relics and will visit the Phoenix area, Nogales, Ariz., and Green Valley, and will be in Tucson at St. Augustine Cathedral, 192 S. Stone Ave.; St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, 8650 N. Shannon Road; and Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church, 1800 S. Kolb Road.

"Christ walked the Earth and suffered for mankind. This shows people that it was real, not just a movie," Garcia said. "It's just to bring us back to reality in our faith. It's not just the Bible, it's something you can actually touch and feel."

The exhibit is part of a six-state tour that will take place during Lent. The eight relics include what are believed to be remains from Jesus' crown of thorns, a piece of exterior wrapping from the Shroud of Turin that some say was Jesus' burial sheet, and a sliver from the cross used to crucify him.

A replica of one of the nails used to hang Christ on the cross also will be part of the display. Though it's not an actual nail used in the crucifixion, organizers say it's made from shavings of some nails that were.

"Certainly, if people saw the movie, now it's time to venerate the relics," said tour organizer Richard Jeffrey, past state deputy for the Arizona Knights of Columbus, referring to Mel Gibson's blockbuster 2004 film, "The Passion of the Christ," which focused on the last 12 hours of Jesus' life.

The Arizona group is still securing details of the tour and additional days and venues could be added, Garcia said.

He said organizers expect crowds that match if not exceed those that turned out in Arizona in 2003 to see a relic called the Tilma of Tepeyac - a half-inch square of cloth that some Catholics believe was part of a cloak worn by St. Juan Diego in 1531 when the humble Aztec peasant spoke to the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac Hill outside Mexico City.

More than 2,000 people lined up to see the tilma when it was displayed at two Tucson churches. That tour also was co-sponsored by the Arizona Knights of Columbus and the Apostolate for Holy Relics. Thousands more turned out to see the tilma in Nogales during another stop on the same tour.

"We did so well with the tilma, that's how we got the relics from the Passion this time," said Tucsonan Pedro Najera, state deputy for the Arizona Knights of Columbus.

"After the election, everyone is saying God is back," he said. "Really I think the fact that the relics are coming to Tucson on the first weekend of Lent will make it very popular. It will be good for morale. Our church is under stress right now, especially the Diocese of Tucson. This will reinforce people's faith."

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The relics normally are housed in the archival museum of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The authenticity of the relics has been questioned, though, including the Shroud of Turin. A carbon dating of the shroud in 1988 said the linen was a medieval fraud no more than 600 years old. A University of Arizona research team was part of that testing.

Mark Rose, executive editor of Archaeology, a New York-based magazine, said the shroud has been proven to be a fabrication and that he knows of no slivers from the actual cross of Jesus in existence.

"Anything like this is strictly a matter of faith because you are going back a couple of thousand years," Rose said. "Think of it in terms of what you would need to establish something in a court. You'd need to establish a chain of custody from Jerusalem to Los Angeles to Arizona or wherever. None of these can be traced back, not a one, so it really is a matter of faith."

Andrew Walther, vice president of the Apostolate for Holy Relics, said the relics are known to have been venerated since the fourth century.

"For people who believe, there's not an explanation necessary. For people who don't, there's no explanation possible," Walther said. "There's at least a 1,700-year tradition - a real continuum among Christians - and that means a lot to us because it's associated with something that happened 2,000 years ago."

Exhibit schedule

— A tentative itinerary for the Arizona stops in the "Relics of the Passion Tour."

Thursday, Feb. 10:

— 7 p.m. St. Timothy's Catholic Church in Mesa. Mass followed by veneration.

Friday, Feb. 11:

— 8:30 a.m. St. John Vianney in Goodyear.

— 5:30 p.m. SS. Simon and Jude Cathedral in Phoenix. Mass followed by veneration until 4 a.m. Feb. 12.

Saturday, Feb. 12:

— 9 a.m. Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Nogales, Ariz. Mass then veneration until 1 p.m.

— 2 p.m. Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church, 505 N. La Cañada Drive, Green Valley. Veneration until 4 p.m.

— 5:30 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral, 192 S. Stone Ave. Mass with Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas followed by veneration.

Sunday, Feb. 13:

— 9 a.m. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, 8650 N. Shannon Road. Mass followed by veneration until 5 p.m.

— 6 p.m. Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church, 1800 S. Kolb Road. Mass followed by veneration.

— Days and venues may be added. Updates will be posted at [www.azknightsforcolumbus.com](http://www.azknightsforcolumbus.com)

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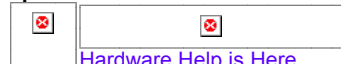
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