

ITALY

The immigrant church venerates 'relic' from boat tragedy

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For a Church that is rewriting its theological paraphernalia in an immigration key, the veneration of the faithful could not be missing. Here it is: a piece of the hull of the boat that sank off the coast of Cutro on 25 February 2023, in the tragic voyage that claimed

the lives of 94 people, which has been elevated to the status of a relic.

The initiative originated in the diocese of Mazara del Vallo, where the bishop, Don Angelo Giurdanella, authorised the veneration of the small fragment of wood retrieved from the boat carrying the migrants. The details of which are described in a complaint filed by the association of lawyers *Iustitia in Veritate*, which brought the curious drift to light.

KR46M0 is the name of the small piece of wood that has been elevated to the status of a relic, crafted by a workshop in Val Bormida that had the idea of framing the piece of wood and giving it a more than symbolic name: that of the infant found dead on the beach of Crotona, who was never identified and who became the symbol of that tragedy.

The idea of creating a relic from the wood of the boat and with such a symbolic name came from a nun, Alessandra Martin, on behalf of the Diocesan Office for Migration and Human Mobility of the Diocese, who a few days ago delivered it to the Bishop so that he could formalise its pilgrimage throughout the Diocese of Mazara until 10 January 2025. To be used for veneration, as is the case with all relics.

The diocesan communiqué reads: This morning KR46M0 was received by our Bishop, Monsignor Angelo Giurdanella. It began its pilgrimage last Saturday and Sunday in the parish of Campobello, greeted by the community in the Sunday celebrations and the children and young people in catechesis'.

From the same communiqué we also learn that the relic's stop over in Castelvetro ended yesterday and that it will then travel from parish to parish, from movement to movement, from association to association, like a 'Pilgrim Virgin Statue'. That is the plan.

A true relic. It's a pity that it in reality isn't, because, as the association *Iustitia in Veritate* reminds us, relics are regulated by canons 1186 - 1190 of Title IV of the Code of Canon Law, which is dedicated to the cult of saints, holy images and relics "to promote the sanctification of the People of God". They specify what can only be designated as such, kept in a sacred place and venerated in the worship of the Christian tradition (*Congregatio de causis sanctorum, Instructio. Reliquiae in Ecclesia: fides et conservatio*, 8 December 2017, art. 25).

In short, the Church has always treated such matters with extreme caution, after discerning what is supernatural and then proceeds to its approval and proposal. Instead, "we are faced with an attempt to impose *ex novo* something that has nothing sacred about it, detached from tradition, violating its nature and diverting a healthy

spiritual path and the faith of the People of God, - continues the association of lawyer Francesco Fontana on its website - . It is an attempt that only the lack of knowledge of the hierarchy can make one believe is useful and propose what cannot be a spiritual reality, thus constructing a God of one's own liking, with whom one believes one is collaborating in the creation of a reality, and not a God who has a healthy and good plan for mankind who follows His will'.

It must be said that it's not the first time shipwrecks have been used for sacred purposes, and with authority. **Pope Francis, during his trip to Lampedusa** in 2013, used a crozier and some sacred vessels made of wood salvaged from a shipwrecked boat off the Sicilian coast. But, with this latest 'stunt' we have gone much further, because using the words 'relic' and 'pilgrimage' invites the faithful to worship.

"One wonders why, in the same way, a new relic should not be created for each innocent child killed by abortion, also marked with an acronym? But you cannot," the association insists, "the new immigrant religion, with its idols and therefore its relics, must prevail, promoting the thinking of those who believe they are co-authors with God in proposing paths to salvation, but who are tragically mistaken in believing that they form a spiritual reality that is free of order, to the point of confusion that they grotesquely create and promote a new relic".

A curious drift. Today, the cult of saints' relics is relegated to something dusty, out of date, something that recalls an idea of an old Church, anchored in traditions and devotion that people no longer feel. Initiatives like this, however, show that people need to orientate their beliefs towards something to be venerated as an expression of the saints or of God Himself. Except that in this case we are not talking about martyrs: the poor migrants who have died at the hands of unscrupulous men who, having kidnapped and deceived them, expose them to the risk of a dangerous crossing, are not martyrs but victims of a cruel trade in human flesh.

But in the new 'word' of the immigrant church, the passage that migrants are a new kind of martyr is imposing. For the use of an ideological position that has no qualms exploiting these poor wretches, sacrificing them on an altar built to celebrate an ideology. More than a relic, an idol.