

ST. BLASE'S AMAZING ADVENTURE

Episode I

The Saint Blase saga started last May when a group of St. Blase parishioners went to Mirebalais, Haiti to work and attend the dedication of the Saint Blase Orphanage. After the ceremony, Father Flabaus, the Pastor of St. Louis Parish, and the person in charge of overseeing the operations of the orphanage, informed our group from Saint Blase, that the people of Haiti really didn't know anything about the good saint (Blase). He thought maybe a statue and/or some information written in Creole would be nice. We naively responded: "No Problem."

Upon our return to the states, we started our search for the statue. We quickly found out by searching local religious stores that the good saint's image was not a popular as you might think. We then tried Googling him — a number of churches appeared, but no statues. Amazon.com also provided zero results. We then checked on how much it would cost to have a statue of St. Blase cast. We received estimates of approximately three thousand dollars for a three to four foot statue. Since we could feed a Haitian family for many years for three thousand dollars, we decided to continue to look and pray harder. Our prayers were answered when John (Messina) was talking to Fr. Mike and mentioned our quandary. Father Mike remembered that while he was pastor of St. Blase, the pastor of St. Anne in Detroit had told him about a statue of St. Blase they had found up in the attic of the church. After a number of inquiry calls we headed down to St. Anne's. By the looks of the statue and the dust accumulated it was estimated that it was probably 30 to 40 years old. No one could answer how St. Blase got into the attic of the oldest church in Detroit. We estimated the statue to be approximately 5 ft. tall and about 70 lbs. (We would discover over the next five months, we were not very good at estimating weight.)

Episode II

In our last episode, St. Blase was found in the rafters of St. Anne's Church in Detroit. St. Blase was then transported to his temporary home at St. Blase at Sterling Heights. We found that the statue had some cosmetic damage and was in need of a "make-over". We also needed a place to keep him until we determined how to make him suitable for travel to Haiti. Our cooperative staff suggested we could put him in the old confessional in church, which was not being used. Have you ever thought of the confessional as "The Penalty Box"? Perhaps Fr. Randy prayed to St. Blase for a Stanley Cup for his beloved Red Wings and when his prayers weren't answered, he sent the Bishop (Blase) to the Penalty Box. We next searched for a competent and talented hand to perform the "make-over". We called on Kathy McGrath, who heads our church's Arts and Environment Committee. Kathy suggested we talk to one of the members of her committee who might be able to help with the plaster makeover. The person agreed to do the work free for us, but requested to remain anonymous. If finding St. Blase at Saint Anne's was the first miracle, the "make-over"

was the second. The transformation was truly stunning! The defects were completely eliminated. St. Blase sparkled with a fresh coat of paint, and with a new staff, he was ready to travel.

Episode III

Now that St. Blase looked fantastic, it was time to pack him up for his final destination. We had decided early that we would bring Saint Blase with us on our flight to Haiti as cargo. This decision was based upon the high cost of sending him UPS and our concern that if we were to ship the statue in a container as freight—it might not make it to the orphanage (which happened on our previous experience with shipping items to Haiti). John Messina and Ron McKay started constructing a wooden box strong enough to protect the statue during the voyage.

Actually, the box was strong enough to protect it even in a hurricane. Knowing that the box was to be handled by different people during the trip, the crew decided they needed to create secure handles for the box. They came up with the idea to install braided rope handles at the sides of the box. The next problem was, even though braided rope handles were a great idea, neither John nor Ron knew how to braid. As the two pondered over this problem, they spotted an older woman—that neither knew—passing by John's garage where the construction was taking place. Seeing her pass, the ever-debonair Ron, approached and asked, "Excuse me ma'am, but do you know how to braid a rope?" She responded in a saintly voice, "Sure." They explained the project and she immediately gave them a lesson in braiding (a lesson they will not soon forget).

They placed the statue of St. Blase in the box and weighed it. They both said, "oh no!" Saint Blase in a box weighed in at 118 lbs. The allowable weight for cargo on a passenger plane is '100 lbs. absolute max'. The team began looking for new packaging options. They believed that they could reduce the weight by putting the statue inside a cardboard box, bubble-wrapped, and with what seemed like a million Styrofoam peanut shells (especially when they were cleaning up the shells from the floor outside of the airport).

Episode IV

We arrived at the airport approximately three hours early. John quickly made contact with the chief skycap at American Airlines and explained how important it was for us to get the statue to the orphanage in Haiti, hopefully in one piece. He said he would be glad to help us, but he could not do anything if St. Blase in a cardboard box exceeded the 100-pound maximum weight limit.

The time for the weigh-in finally arrived. Twenty of our fellow travelers going to Mirebalais joined us. We gathered around the scale in the breezeway where the scale was located. The box was placed on the scale as we held our collective breaths. The skycap announced 111 lbs. We gasped and asked, "How much can we be over?"

He responded, "It cannot be over 100 pounds." Our minds raced. We decided the only way that we could possibly get the statue on the plane was to ship St. Blase without the box and without the Styrofoam peanuts. We cut open the box and the peanuts nearly covered the walkway. People now entering the terminal, stopped and wondered what was going on.

We quickly put St. Blase, now only protected by bubble wrap, on the scale. The skycap smiled and said ninety-nine pounds. People were hugging and yelling. We slapped fragile stickers around Saint Blase and sent him on his way. We then proceeded to clean up the mess and get in line to board the plane.

We flew from Detroit Metro to Chicago to Miami to Port-a-Prince, changing planes at each location. We attempted to watch at each destination hoping to see the statue being unloaded and reloaded on the correct plane. We were obsesses. When St. Blase was finally unloaded in Haiti, there were tears in many eyes.

Final Episode

After clearing customs in Port-a-Prince, Saint Blase was laid carefully in the van carrying our luggage, and we were on our five hour bus ride to Mirabalais (the five hour trip is approximately 60 miles). We arrived at Saint Louis Rectory and decided that it would be best to wait until Sunday afternoon to bring the St. Blase statue to the orphanage for his unveiling or if you prefer his "un-bubble wrapping."

Sunday morning we went to Mass at St. Louis at 5:30 a.m. Saint Louis is a large church and it was filled to near capacity. After lunch we loaded the statue in the bus and all twenty-four of us proceeded to the orphanage, which was a half a mile away. As we pulled up to the orphanage, the children came running out the doors with smiles of anticipation. We unloaded the statue and placed him, still wrapped, on the porch directly under the sign in Creole "Pension de L'Orphelinat St. Blase."

The unwrapping process started and we still didn't know in what shape or, how many, many pieces the statue might be in. When St. Blase was finally unwrapped, he was in near perfect condition! There were a few minor scratches on the back of his cloak, but otherwise St. Blase looked pious and beautiful. And how did the children respond to the ceremony? They jumped with glee for at least fifteen minutes. Of course they were jumping with glee, because they were jumping on the bubble wrap that had protected the statue. It sounded like the 4th of July! How appropriate for St. Blase on the first day in his new home!

St. Blase Haiti Outreach Committee