

# Calkins: St. Jude's arm is coming to Memphis. Maybe it's just in time.

By [Geoff Calkins](#), Daily Memphian

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Father Carlos Martins called me from the road.

Of course he did.

For nearly seven months now, Martins — the director of Treasures of the Church, a Vatican ministry that organizes traveling exhibits of sacred relics — has been driving alone across the country with the arm of St. Jude.

[St. Jude's historic roadmap in the segregated South](#)

The actual St. Jude, a man considered by the

Catholic Church to be one of the original Twelve Apostles.

Martins drives an armored truck, which holds a wooden reliquary carved in the shape of an arm delivering a blessing, which contains bones believed to be from the right arm of the man known as Judas Thaddeus, or St. Jude.

And if this is the actual arm of St. Jude, it has been around the shoulders of Jesus.

“Many times,” said Martins. “I’m 100% certain.”

I’ll get to the reasons for his certainty in a bit.

DAILY MEMPHIAN

**Geoff Calkins**



Geoff Calkins has been chronicling Memphis and Memphis sports for more than two decades. He is host of "The Geoff Calkins Show" from 9-11 a.m. M-F on 92.9 FM. Calkins has been named the best sports columnist in the country five times by the Associated Press sports editors, but still figures his best columns are about the people who make Memphis what it is.

But St. Jude is coming to Memphis — where St. Jude is already a pretty big deal.

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### St. Jude to air first-ever Super Bowl ad

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The Apostle of the Impossible Tour (that’s the official name) is stopping at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Saturday, March 9, from 2 to 8 p.m.

So, seriously, who needs Drake?

“There is great excitement,” said Rev. Robert Szczechura, pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. “We are hoping for thousands of people.”

If you’re a Memphian, you doubtless know why St. Jude is so important to the city. But let’s have Martins tell the story one more time.

“When Danny Thomas was struggling in his career, someone told him to pray to St. Jude,” Martins said. “He prayed in front of a statue of St. Jude. He told him that if he could find his way in life, he would build him a shrine.”

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### St. Jude Memphis Marathon runners show up ‘for the kids’

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That shrine became St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.



**A wooden reliquary holds the arm bones of apostle St. Jude Thaddeus. The arm will be on display at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Memphis Saturday, March 9.** (Courtesy Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception)

But why did Thomas put it in Memphis? He prayed to a statue of St. Jude in Detroit, after all.

It turns out that the person who suggested Thomas pray to St. Jude, Cardinal Samuel Stritch, once served as a young priest at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Memphis. He thought Memphis — more than Detroit, more than Chicago — needed a children’s hospital.

As for why St. Jude’s arm is now on tour? And how do we know it’s authentic? Let’s go back to Father Martins to answer that.

**The Daily Memphian: What is the reason for the tour now? And has the arm ever been to the U.S. before?**

Rev. Carlos Martins: “No, never. And why now? Well, because Jude is the patron saint of hopeless causes, desperate situations. We are coming off a devastating pandemic. Some are still suffering the loss of a loved one. I think most people are suffering the effects of social distancing. It seemed like the right time.”

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[‘It’s all for these kids:’ Thousands unite at the St. Jude Memphis Marathon](#)

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Danny Thomas holds a child after unveiling the statue of St. Jude at dedication ceremonies for the \$5-million hospital on Feb. 4, 1962, in Memphis. Twenty-five years earlier, Thomas prayed to St. Jude, the Patron Saint of hopeless causes, asking success and promised a shrine in return. (AP Photo file)

**How confident are you that it is the arm of St. Jude?**

“I’m 100% confident. Jude was martyred along with Simon. All the records are unanimous. Jude was clubbed and beheaded with an ax. And you can see a bad break toward the front of the forearm. Toward the back, where it connects with the elbow, it’s in a very different state. You can see the front part, the wrists are broken off. There is a trauma on the bone that is evident.”

### **But how do you know those bones are St. Jude?**

“They were buried on site near the place where they were martyred. That’s how we know. The ancients believed that if your life was taken, if you were killed, you needed to be buried near the place that occurred. Then, Christians did what Christians do. They built a church over the place of the burial. That marked the place where the bodies were buried. And it provided a place for the Sunday Eucharist.”

### **Where are the remains usually kept? And why is this just his arm?**

“The Emperor Constantine, building a new basilica, brought the skeletons to Rome. About 500 years ago, the tomb was opened and the right arm was removed.” (Note: The arm is usually kept at the Church of San Salvatore, also in Rome).

Rev. Martins is wonderfully warm and helpful about all this. He drives his truck from city to city by himself, telling the story of St. Jude at every stop.

How did St. Jude become the patron saint of lost causes and desperate situations in the first place?

Naturally, there is a story there, too.

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#### ‘It’s like the Royal Wedding of St. Jude’

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“Something happened around the year 500, a kind of cancerous thinking,” Martins said. “If I pray to St. Judas — his name was Judas Thaddeus — if I pray to St. Judas, my prayers may inadvertently go to Judas Iscariot, and they won’t be heard.”

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, after all.

Best not to risk the possible mix-up there.

“So all devotions to St. Jude stopped,” Martin said. “But then, around 1700, people were in desperate need of a miracle. And having prayed to every other saint, they thought, ‘What have I got to lose?’ So they began praying to St. Jude, and he knocked them out of the park. St. Jude became the patron saint of hopeless causes and desperate situations because that’s all that were given to him.”

I thought about bringing up the Memphis Grizzlies at this point. Or maybe our potholes. Or crime.

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### St. Jude’s Downing named as an influential health care leader

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“Thousands have come to venerate the relic with their own prayers and desperate situations,” Martins said. “It’s a privilege to be able to facilitate these kind of experiences. They are able to experience a touch of heaven.”

So you should expect to wait in line Saturday. Because so much can seem hopeless these days, in the city and beyond. The state of our politics. The state of our globe.

And not far from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, there is a children’s cancer hospital where doctors and nurses work to cure seemingly hopeless situations every single day.

There is no formal relationship between the hospital and the current tour, as it turns out, but the connection is impossible to miss. Danny Thomas believed. And that belief resulted in a hospital that is an ongoing miracle.

So, St. Jude is coming to Memphis this weekend.

But St. Jude is already here.

#### TOPICS

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