

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

THE SOLANUS STORY...

Just the other day a parishioner spoke to me after mass and asked if I knew about Father Solanus Casey who was declared a "blessed" of the Church last November. I told her yes, I did know something about his very holy life, chiefly from a good friend of mine, Father Donatus Goetz, a Capuchin priest who was assigned to Sacred Heart Parish in Yonkers, New York. Often I would go to confession to him there at the parish, and I learned about the life of this holy friar who will someday be declared a saint of the Church.

Who was Father Solanus Casey? He was born Bernard Casey on November 25, 1870 in Prescott, Wisconsin. "Barney" as he was known, was one of sixteen children and was a normal child who loved baseball and yet was very prayerful. As a young man, he worked for a time as a streetcar conductor in his hometown. One day, on the job, he witnessed a brutal murder of a young woman. That incident made Bernard Casey think more about spiritual realities.

He entered the diocesan seminary but the studies proved too much for him and he had to leave. Eventually, he applied for the Capuchin Order and was accepted in 1897. He left for the novitiate in Detroit in a blinding snowstorm and for weeks wondered if he had made the right decision in applying for this order which was noted for its austerity. However, once he donned the brown robes of the Franciscans, he never looked back. He was given the religious name of "Solanus."

As a student, Solanus tried very hard-the classes were in German which was not his native tongue, and he did not do as well as he could have done in his studies. When the time came for ordination, his superiors decided to ordain him as a "Simplex" priest. "Simplex" means that Father Solanus was prohibited from hearing confessions or ever preaching a sermon in his ministry which was very, very humiliating as you can imagine! Yet this holy man accepted that limitation as the will of God for his life.

His first assignment was at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Yonkers. There is a shrine there in his honor which includes the baptismal font he used when assigned at the parish. Although Father Solanus was limited in what he could do as a priest, he made up for all that by his great personal holiness. Days for the Capuchins began at 5 O'clock in the morning but Solanus was up long before that praying in the chapel. Although he never heard a confession, people with problems flocked to him in droves for his spiritual counsel and also for his healing touch. God working through Father Solanus performed miracles of healing both physically and spiritually.

As a priest, he was assigned to Manhattan, Detroit, Brooklyn, and Indiana. Father Solanus died on July 31st, 1957. His last words were, "I give my soul to Jesus Christ!" In a time when there are so many scandals in the church and society, it's refreshing to think about a wonderful role model like Father Solanus who although he had adversity and problems, persevered with God's grace and became a humble instrument in his hands.

This week it might be good for all of us to reflect on his words: "Worry is a weakness from which very few of us are entirely free. We must be on guard against this enemy of our peace of soul. Instead, let us foster confidence in God and thank Him ahead of time for whatever He chooses to send us." Blessed Solanus, pray for us!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*