



21 July 2009, #198

A Message about Father Solanus

My Reflections of Father Solanus Casey by Werner Wolf, Capuchin

(Werner Wolf is currently the Local Minister at St. Lawrence Friary in Mt. Calvary, WI. Known primarily for his hospitality and friendliness in the friary among the brothers, Werner has also held a wide variety of ministerial positions; too many of which to mention completely. During his 18 years at St. Lawrence Seminary, he worked as a teacher, counselor, and administrator. He spent many years as a vocation director. Werner's love for preaching and his skills in administration lead him to further years of service at St. Anthony's Retreat Center in Marathon, WI, and Monte Alverno Retreat Center in Appleton, WI. It is Werner's humor, however, that keeps us laughing and reminds us of the wonderful promises of God's goodness and peace.



His voice was screechy. His movement slow and jerky. His energy faster than his body. He walked with focus. He knew where he was and Who was about him. He greeted those who came into his path.

His "Huh, have faith" spurted out many times as I passed him near a phone booth. He was holy. He was famous. He was talked about. He healed people. People went wild when he came into their presence. He was unassuming. He listened. He gave advice. He prayed. He blessed. He smiled ...and went on.

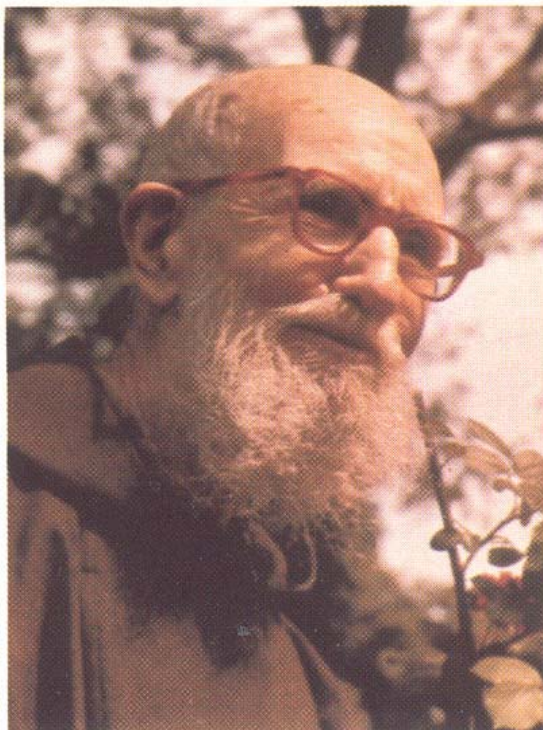
There was something special about him. He was Father Solanus Casey, a Capuchin at St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana, in the years 1950 to 1955 when I knew him. I was a student. I was a young Capuchin novice, later a student studying philosophy and completing my college years at St. Felix.

Young people get giddy because they see the idiosyncrasies more readily and make fun of them, especially in older people. I was one of them. Although I was a Capuchin novice, I did mimic Father Solanus. Many of us did. I guess mimicry in young people is a sign of respect. We knew his mannerisms and followed his patterns. We experienced his faith.

Today in homilies I still refer to Father Solanus and imitate his gesture of entry into the choir or chapel, plopping on the floor to kiss it. His arthritis was bad, yet he always knelt to kiss the floor upon entering chapel as was the Capuchin custom at the time. He was faithful to the least details. He smiled at this own weaknesses and was strong in conviction.

Father Solanus was a faithful man. He had faith that you could see. I saw it in chapel as he prayed ... and even fell asleep praying. I saw it and heard it as he talked to people in the office or on the phone in the corridors. "Faith," his voice would scratch, "huh, have faith!"

He was ahead of his time. That's what I said when I became involved in charismatic renewal



VENERABLE SOLANUS CASEY
CAPUCHIN
1870-1957

Vocation Update

in the 70's. I was energized by the Spirit. The Word of God became alive. I experienced and prayed with people for inner healing. I anointed people with oil and asked to be prayed over as I also prayed over them. I could not help but think back to Father Solanus – that which I judged “out of the ordinary” and “for saints” was part of my own growing faith experience and ministry.



Artwork by Michael Gaffney, Capuchin

He was ahead of his time! He prayed with people, healed people, anointed them, challenged them to Gospel living with the blink of an eye or without a thought of what other people might think. He had faith – spontaneously! He wore His God. God was present and he knew God would bless, anoint, heal, forgive, challenge, listen, console, smile and philosophize through his humble gifts and mannerisms.

We Capuchin students loved Father Solanus. We knew his faith and how it came forth to whomever approached him. He could be very serious. Busloads would come from Detroit and other places. He was there to greet them, bless them with his relic of the twelve apostles. He also gave them a bottle of blessed water. I never knew where it was from. But he believed in symbols and sacred gestures.



The Creation Garden at the Solanus Casey Center near St. Bonaventure Friary in Detroit, MI. Notice Brother Wind, Sister Water, Brother Fire, and Sister Moon in the artwork.

He must have known that young people did not always appreciate his mannerisms or even his playing of the violin. As novices we had a community recreation with all other professed Capuchins Sunday evenings from 8:30 to 9:00 P.M. Some evenings our novice master, Father Elmer, or the superior, Father Raphael, would ask Father

Solanus to play violin for the community. He was not the most proficient. Mistakes and off-key notes were obvious. And as in young circles we got the giggles and despite trying to really restrain ourselves, suffered the consequences.

I spent my sophomore, junior and senior college years living under the same roof as Father Solanus at St. Felix. As Capuchins we knew his stature among so many devotees and at the same time we accepted him as we would any other Capuchin. We also knew his ministry was different and his dedication was profound.

I had the privilege to being the overseer for Father's golden jubilee meal at SS. Peter & Paul Parish Hall in Huntington. Fathers Thomas Aquinas Heidenreich and Cuthbert Gumbinger were silver jubilarians. Father Solanus was the main celebrant of the jubilee Mass and humbly fulfilled the role he was asked to take in the celebrations. Invitations were limited. Many came and went.

After I left Huntington for St. Anthony's in Marathon, Wisconsin, and then with the press of theological studies, ordination and first assignments in Milwaukee and later St. Lawrence Seminary, Father Solanus faded into the background. I still heard of his healings and fame as he was transferred back to Detroit. I followed the stories of his life and eventual death as quite an ordinary event in the life of a friar.

In 1978 I was transferred to Detroit as director of the Capuchin Pre-Novitiate and Vocation Office. Father Solanus again became alive for me. Wherever I went in Michigan I would run into people who would constantly say: “I went to see Father Solanus...” “My child was ill and we went to see Father Solanus...” “My grandmother knew Father Solanus...” Stories of his listening, advice, forecasting of events and miraculous healings were commonplace in the lives of the people.

When I was preaching missions, renewals and retreats in the 1980's, people would come to me

Vocation Update



and talk about Father Solanus. They had visited him, had a relative who was healed or converted, or knew a friend who was recently healed by praying for Father Solanus' intercession before God.

These were stories like I read in the lives of the saints. I realized that his is what canonization is all about – the person is alive through the lives of the people. One does not need a process. All one needs to do is look about and listen. As St. Francis was popularly acclaimed a saint after his death, so Father Solanus has been acclaimed the saintly Capuchin by so many people in the areas where he lived and ministered.

Yes, Father Solanus is still alive in the hearts of people and has been so for years.

It is interesting to note that it is almost an unwritten tradition that Father Solanus does not heal Capuchins. I never heard him say so but Capuchins pass on the word that Father Solanus always felt that Capuchins should

Thinking about becoming a priest or brother? What do you do next? Just email John or Jerry and we'll help you get started. We can talk or send some information and a dvd; just let us know. See our email addresses below.



A statue of the young Solanus at St. Joseph Parish in Appleton, WI



endure the pain and struggles of their lives. He prayed with and over us, but as to healings and miracles, these were for other religious and the laity.

For me, Father Solanus is a saint. He is alive. God gifted him and he allowed God to use these gifts to the best of his ability. Faith was central. All Church life and sacrament was sacred. He was a man of God. He was human. He made mistakes. He was not the most talented, but God used him just as he was.

I admired his simplicity, honesty, and deep, deep faith. I have been going to Father Solanus' grave for years, first in the cemetery and now in St. Bonaventure Chapel. He is a model, a brother who lived his Catholic and Capuchin life to the full. I honor him together with all my brothers and intercede with him to continue to be with us who are still on the journey. Praise the Lord!

New inquirers are welcome!—make reservations with John Holly or Jerry Johnson
Next event:
August 7, Mt. Calvary, WI
Jubilee Mass & Celebration
August 8, Mt. Calvary, WI
David Hirt's First Profession of Vows

Contact Fr. John Holly 920-915-4400
jholly1953@yahoo.com or
Br. Jerry Johnson 773-475-6206
vocation@capuchinfranciscans.org
or visit
www.CapuchinFranciscans.org
and click on <How to Begin>