

North American Lay Fraternities

Letter from Fr. Lenny

Very Dear Little Flock,

If by saints we mean the famous and recognized people, beatified and canonized, it can be kind of like the Pop Ten, Top of the Charts Record Albums. Who's in this year? Carlos Acutis tops the charts. It often is the result of a Vatican canonization and the free publicity that comes along with it. We have had for hundreds of years a Sacred Congregation in Rome whose job it is to process the thousands of names submitted by the countries around the world. At present there are 8 black Americans who are in process. The most well-known is Sr. Thea Bowman. The National Conference of Black Catholics is

demanding that the Vatican move forward with each cause, but the "Saint Factory," as I call it, doesn't work that way – or at any speed at all. By doing a Google search on the canonization process, you will find that the Church demands a real bonafide miracle for each cause.

The word canonization simply means this person is holy enough to be publicly mentioned in the Mass and public veneration. Their name can be added to the Canon of the Eucharist, more commonly known as the Eucharistic Prayer. After the mention of the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph, we can add the name of a bonafide saint. Now as to our own SAINT Charles de Foucauld, our little brother must have been hiding somewhere in heaven the day he was canonized - but I was a happy camper in the Vatican Square,

cheering nice and loud when his name was finally mentioned!

The cause for beatification in the St. Charles case was 70 years old. He was recognized and often called St. Charles for many years before the title. The benefit of all this fuss is simply that an unknown person becomes somewhat famous in the Catholic Church world. In the past 2 or 3 years, this

has been true for us in the English-speaking world. Several books have been published on his life and spirituality since the canonization. Pope Francis is clearly a fan of St Charles.

I invite you to research and learn about the many saints and heroes who are connected by a mysterious umbilical cord to St. Charles. He has many spiritual children, giving

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"Let us become saints so that after having been together on earth, we may be together in heaven." – St. Padre Pio

Saints

Editor's Desk

You may have noticed that Fr. Lenny refers to Blessed Carlo Acutis in his cover letter, which was submitted for publication before Pope Francis announced on 11/20/24 that Blessed Acutis would be canonized during the Jubilee of Teenagers (4/25-4/27/25). Pope Francis also proclaimed that Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati would be canonized during the Jubilee of Youth (7/28-8/3/25). These soon-to-be saints, who passed away from natural causes at a young age, are an inspiration to all of us – no matter what age number we are.

If you read the biographies of these young Blessed, you will find that their holiness consisted of making a multitude of good choices, which Catholic author Matthew Kelly calls "Holy Moments." In his book, *Holy Moments: A Handbook for the Rest of Your Life*, Mr. Kelly defines a Holy Moment "as a single moment in which you open yourself to God. You make yourself available to Him. You set aside personal preference and self-interest, and for one moment you do what you prayerfully believe God is calling you to do." In my "Desert Ramblings" column, I call extraordinary holy moments "Saintly Moments."

In the article "How to be Saints," Heriberto discusses the importance of reading the lives of the saints, who "awaken in us the desire to know and follow Christ." For years I have been reading the 2006 English version of the book, "Saints: A Year in Faith and Art" by Rosa Giorgi.



In addition to the daily well-researched biographies, there is an accompanied reproduction of a classical painting depicting the saint. This book surprisingly is still available. Amazon sells used copies of this book at a discounted price. According to an online search, new copies can be ordered through a few other companies (many are out of stock).

The spiritual family of St. Charles de Foucauld, as Fr. Lenny points out, has many saints even though they may not be canonized – yet. One of these is Rev. Bryan Karvelis, a Jesus Caritas priest, who truly lived the Gospel and

implemented the spirituality of Br. Charles in his own parish in Brooklyn, New York. The article on Fr. Bryan in this issue is lengthy but well worth the time.

The theme for our next issue (March, 2025) is "Humility." The deadline for submission of articles is February 20th. May you and your family have a blessed Christmas and healthy, happy New Year!

Fr. Lenny Concluded

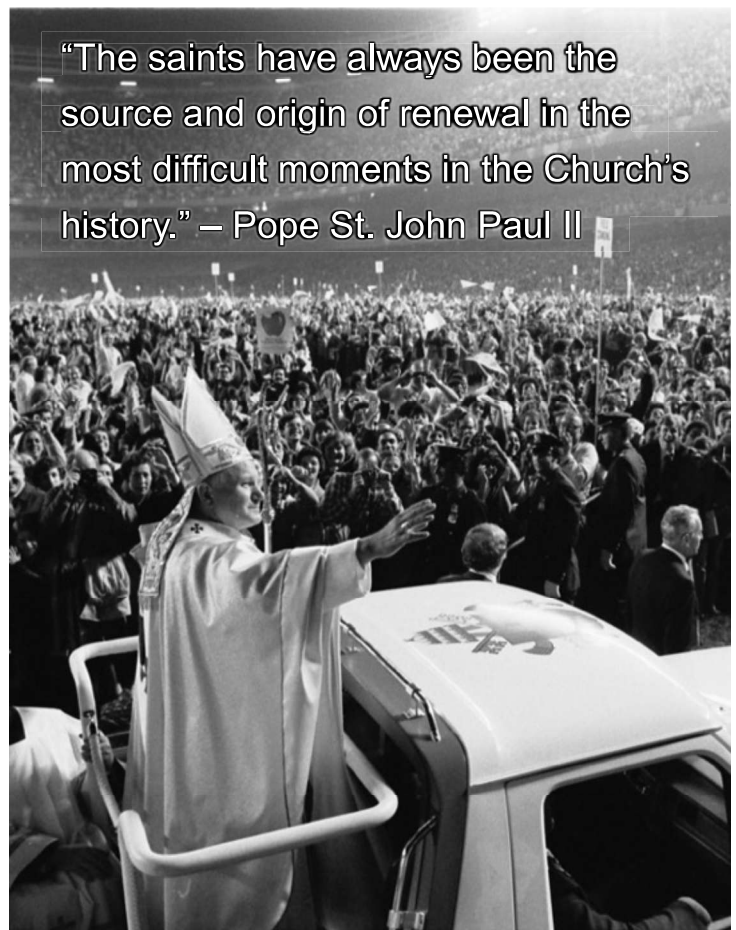
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birth after death to many saints and founders. This list keeps growing: Louis Massignon, Fr Albert Peyriguere, Madeleine Delbrel, Dorothy Day, Fr Rene Voillaume, Sister Madeleine Hutin, Yves Congar, Christian de Charge OCSO.

During this Season filled with frills and tinsel, we are all called to embrace the deeper Gift... Mary places Jesus in your arms.

You are loved. – Fr. Lenny

"The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history." – Pope St. John Paul II



NEWS FROM LAY FRATERNITIES

According to Jose Perez, our communications contact, Transfiguration Church in Brooklyn celebrated its 150th anniversary in mid-October.



Heriberto Calderon Möller, Responsible for our North American Region as well as a Lay Fraternity in Mexico, also sent us a photo. His Lay Fraternity raises funds to purchase and deliver food for the needy every month.



Melanie Golder, a member of the California Lay Fraternity, recently became a grandmother of a second grandchild, Rose Evaline, on the vigil of All Saints (5:17 p.m.)! Rose is healthy and doing well!

How to be Saints by Heriberto Calderon Möller

The saints are friends, protectors who guide us from heaven, teach us how to live and always show us the way to Jesus. When we read their lives, we discover that they are men and women like us whose dedication to the Lord was exemplary.

The distinctive feature of all of them is their deep love for God and the Church, as well as their kindness and dedication to their neighbors. They are concrete examples of people who were able to live doing the will of God. They precede us on the path of faith and are already in heaven with Him. They are faithful witnesses of the Gospel who teach us how to interpret it in our daily lives.

The saints are people who have given their lives, followers of the beatitudes, have known how to become poor in spirit, merciful, overcame selfishness, have always forgiven... that is why they become a model for us. Becoming familiar with the saints by reading about their lives helps us in our journey by awakening in us the desire to know and follow Christ. For example, St. Ignatius of Loyola tells us in his writings that reading the lives of the saints left him with a deep and lasting peace and Joy.

Reading the lives of the saints helps to counteract the temptation of hopelessness, thinking that it is not possible to live as God wants. In them we see concrete examples, which is why venerating the memory of the saints, reading their lives and asking for their intercession reminds us that our primary vocation is to become saints.

St. Francis of Assisi Feast Day at the Dog Park by Arlene Moeller & John Hoffman

John Hoffman, who works with the homeless in central Phoenix, arranged a blessing of the animals at the largest dog park in the area. John had two gallons of natural spring water blessed by his spiritual director, Fr. Jude, which was taken to the dog park. The pet owners dipped their hands in the water, and the pups drank. All shared stories about their dogs, and John chanted the Prayer of St. Francis.



Humility

Please submit your articles for the March 2025 issue by February 20, 2025 to nalf@moeller2001.com.

Rev. Bryan J. Karvelis and the Lay Fraternities of Transfiguration Church by Arlene Moeller

Just imagine... Your local parish church offers you the choice of joining one of their twenty-three Lay Fraternities. You learn that each fraternity attends two retreats per year out in the country at a place owned by the parish. The pastor, the only priest on staff, is a member of Jesus Caritas and has been the only priest assigned to the church for decades. Of course, for most of us living in the United States, this type of parish would be unheard of – except if you were a member of Transfiguration Church in Brooklyn, New York during the almost fifty years that Fr. Bryan cared for his flock.

Jose Perez, who is in charge of communications on our newsletter staff, is a member of Transfiguration and has been attending Lay Fraternity meetings there with his family since he was a child. He provided me with three contacts to interview who had known Fr. Bryan.

Alejandro Enriquez, First Rectory Immigrant. Alejandro and his wife, Petra, are currently Responsibles for a Lay Fraternity at Transfiguration. Their involvement as a couple in the fraternity began 44 years ago. I interviewed Alejandro by phone on 10/14/24 in an effort to find out more about Fr. Bryan.

Alejandro spoke fondly of Fr. Bryan as he reminisced. He met Fr. Bryan in 1976 when he was fifteen years old. At the time he was living with his uncle, where he found living with the young children was just too much for him. He decided to go to the rectory and talk to Fr. Bryan about his situation. It was then that Fr. Bryan invited Alejandro to live in the rectory and at the same time asked him if he could read the second Scripture text for this Sunday's Mass! Alejandro recalled that his knees were shaking as he read. Afterwards Fr. Bryan remarked, "You did beautiful. I hope you do more."

Alejandro reflected that Fr. Bryan was "like my father" for the three or four years that he lived with him. During that time period, Alejandro witnessed Fr. Bryan opening up his home to teens and young men from other countries as well – El Salvador, Columbia, Mexico, Guatemala, and the Congo. (The females went to the convent on the church property.) Alejandro described Fr. Bryan as being a very humble man who would say, "You are my sons." Alejandro noted, "He made us all feel very comfortable." Fr. Bryan would cook for them. He recalled one Thanksgiving when there were thirty-five young men. Fr. Bryan cooked all of the turkeys and served the dinner.

Alejandro stated that Fr. Bryan started several ministries (with the blessing of the Bishop) during his fifty years at Transfiguration Church. He opened a residence for AIDS patients (more on that later), a 10-bed shelter, and a Credit Union at the church so that illegals had a place to go to cash their work checks. Fr. Bryan would take three or four teens with him every Wednesday and take them to Tabor, the parish retreat house an hour away from the city. The teens would help Fr. Bryan grow tomatoes, jalapeno peppers, etc. as well as other farm work. He also taught them how to ice skate. Alejandro reflected, "The parishioners thought Fr. Bryan was like a saint." He remembered Fr. staying still for three to four hours at one time while he sat in Adoration at Tabor.

In regard to Fr. Bryan's connection to St. Charles de Foucauld, Alejandro explained that as a young priest Fr. Bryan attended a Jesus Caritas Priests Fraternity retreat where he was given a book on Br. Charles, written by Rene Voillaume. After reading the book, Fr. Bryan knew that this was his calling – to live a poor life like Charles de Foucauld. The bishop gave Fr. Bryan permission to live in his own apartment among the poor for three to four years. He received visitors and had a chapel there. When Fr. Bryan became a new pastor, he had to reside in the rectory.



Rev. Bryan J. Karvelis

Alejandro emphasized again that Fr. Bryan was like his father, and Transfiguration Church was his second family. The reason why Alejandro moved out of the rectory was because he was going to get married. Fr. Bryan officiated over their wedding and later baptized all three of their daughters.

Before we leave Alejandro, there is one more story that needs to be told. One day when Alejandro was a teen, he came home late (5:00 a.m.) after going to a party and drinking two or three beers. When Alejandro opened the rectory door, Fr. Bryan was on the other side and wished him good morning. He advised Alejandro to get some sleep before the 10:00 am Mass. As a consequence, Fr. Bryan had Alejandro stand in front of the congregation and read the second Scripture passage!

Ciro Ortega, A Son Until Death. **Ciro** was twenty years old when he arrived in New York from a Central American country with no place to go. After several days on the streets, **Ciro** met Fr. Bryan who told him, “Don’t sit on your own sh**!” **Ciro** not only became another young resident in the rectory but was treated “like a son.” At times when **Ciro** expressed to Fr. Bryan that he wanted to move on, Fr. Bryan would counter with, “Move on where? I want you to be in this community.” Fr. Bryan knew that he had no family of his own. **Ciro** spoke to Fr. Bryan on three different occasions about leaving to free up space for others, but his answer was always the same – and **Ciro** listened.

Ciro (and others in the parish) stayed with Fr. Bryan when he was hospitalized for eleven days before passing away on 10/18/2005. **Ciro** recalled the night nurse coming in to tell him that Father’s sole kidney, which he had for 25 years, had failed. Ten hours later, Fr. Bryan passed away. At that moment **Ciro** witnessed something that was “not normal.” The light in the room that night was dim, but all of a sudden, the light became “really, really bright.” When Fr. Bryan’s body was washed, his surface skin was found to be “totally clean, like new.” The bruises from medical equipment, etc. were gone. **Ciro** noted that the body remained in this state for “thirteen hours and five minutes.”

Ciro took Fr. Bryan’s death very hard since he was like a father to him. He had cut Fr. Bryan’s hair for sixteen years as well as drove the car back and forth to Tabor. Father helped **Ciro** grow in his faith and his love for the Eucharist – and not to be afraid of dying.

Ciro recalled Fr. Bryan reading a biography on Charles de Foucauld and underlining the words. Father also talked about Br. Charles and strived to follow his example as well as the Gospel. Brotherhood was the center of Fr. Bryan’s life, and, in **Ciro**’s opinion, he demonstrated that when he opened his door and invited us to live with him. Like Br. Charles, prayer and Eucharistic Adoration was very important to Fr. Bryan. **Ciro** said that Father would pray before the Eucharist from 6:00 am-7:00 am, noon-1:00 pm, and an hour in the afternoon every day even though his life was very busy. When **Ciro** would ask Fr. Bryan if he had a minute to talk to him, often his reply was, “When I come back from the chapel.” **Ciro** stressed that Father taught the Transfiguration community to appreciate the Eucharist. Daily Mass was so well attended that the entire church would be filled to capacity!

Ciro shared that Fr. Bryan worked with the area gang members until the end of the 1970’s, which was before the fraternities were formed. He was able to stop the gangs from killing each other. He even had the gangs change their names to the different missionary churches that St. Paul ministered to. Some of these gang members changed their lives and became professionals. Some of them ended up being members of the parish’s Lay Fraternities.

According to Fr. Bryan’s obituary in the New York Times, these “social clubs” met at a youth center across the street from the church. The Romans, Corinthians, etc. wore sweaters with insignias, attended dances, and marched in parades.

Ciro remembered fondly Fr. Bryan’s standard answer whenever anyone asked him how he was doing. Father would reply, “En la lucha,” which means “In the struggle.” Fr. Bryan, a son of Irish and Lithuanian parents, was fluent in Spanish.

Memories from Little Brother Chepito. Br. Chepito met Fr. Bryan in 1977 when he was a postulant for the Little Brothers of the Gospel. Often the Little Brothers would join Fr. Bryan and members of the Transfiguration community (20-40 people) in the church basement chapel for Adoration, Mass, etc. – “like a short retreat” and end with lunch. (Sound familiar?) Br. Chepito recalled how Fr. Bryan would always link faith with everyday life and social justice. He was a “great communicator” and had a good sense of humor.

Fr. Chepito said that Fr. Bryan helped many Latin immigrants by setting up structures to assist them. For instance, he found a lawyer to assist the immigrants with their legal status. Fr. Bryan helped the poorest of the poor. He was totally dedicated, prayerful, a wonderful example. Br. Chepito remarked, "He was a real prophet." He explained that Fr. Bryan truly lived Matthew 25:35-37 ("For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in...") Fr. Bryan was "out there day by day in the community."

Fr. Bryan also was a member of the diocesan priests' group, Jesus Caritas. He led a group of six or seven Jesus Caritas priests, and they met periodically for prayer, Adoration, and Review of Life just like the Lay Fraternities in the parish. This group was very important to Father.

Fr. Bryan even provided housing for AIDS patients, which some people in his neighborhood were not happy about. Br. Chepito emphasized that Father was "very prophetic" in regard to assisting this population, refusing to treat them like the lepers of biblical times. (Br. Chepito referred me to Br. Jay for more information regarding the AIDS house, as Br. Jay had worked there.)

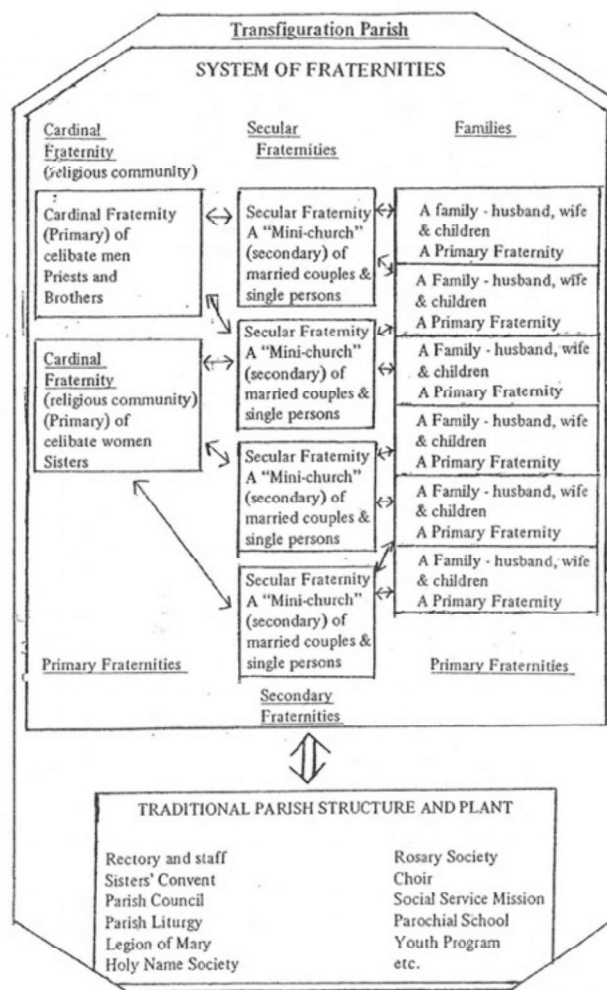
Br. Chepito stressed, "Fr. Bryan was really a prophet for our times. He had a wonderful impact that is felt even today. His impact has only become stronger since his death."

Br. Jay, Coordinator of the Aids House. Br. Jay, A Little Brother of the Gospel, became a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) in 1991 and began working with AIDS patients. After Fr. Bryan had the old convent on the church property converted to a home for AIDS patients, Br. Jay became the coordinator. Back then, there were no safety precautions in place, and the patients were free to come and go. There were both men and women in the home, and sadly the majority used/abused illegal drugs. By the time Br. Jay left the program four years later, all of the patients had passed away except for one. Reflecting back on those days, Br. Jay believed that all of the patients appreciated his presence. (Later the home was taken over by Catholic Charities.) During Br. Jay's last year there, the Lay Fraternities in the parish cooked meals and brought the food to the home.

A New Tree Grows in Brooklyn. Fr. Bryan did not write any books during his life. However, he did write a 31-page booklet in 1972 (revised in 1975), A New Tree Grows in Brooklyn. According to Ciro Ortega, Fr. Bryan fully implemented every page of the booklet during his decades as pastor at Transfiguration. In short, this "letter" written to the Lay Fraternities at Transfiguration, "was his life."

In the prologue Father explains the beginnings and growth of "The Fraternity of Jesus of Nazareth" (all of the "Secular Fraternities" of Transfiguration Parish), beginning with Fr. Bryan becoming a member of the priests' group, Jesus Caritas in 1959. He wrote, "It was one of the most powerful experiences of 'church' I have ever had in my life. In it I learned in a profound way to meet Jesus in a community of love, in a community of people open and totally dedicated to seeking Jesus together and to serving one another."

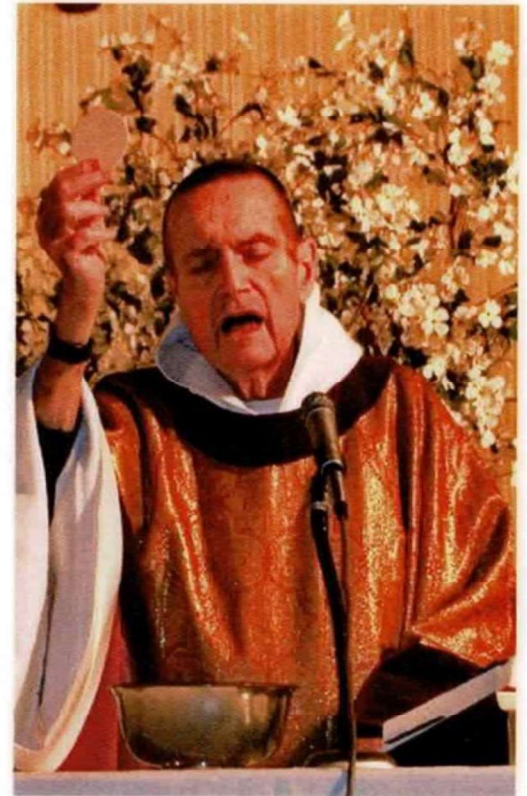
The only graphic in the booklet is an illustration, which diagrams the unique structure of Transfiguration Parish. In the booklet Fr. Bryan writes about the importance of the priests and religious at Transfiguration having strong "Cardinal Fraternities" (aka "Primary Fraternities"). This also applies to families (aka "Primary Fraternities"). Fr. Bryan discusses the importance of healthy, loving relationships within the family,



The arrows indicate the flow of mutual support, of ideas and exchanges.

which is the foundation for growing in the love of Jesus. The Secular Fraternities are made up of married couples and single persons, whom exchange friendship/mutual support with the Primary Fraternities. There is also a mutual exchange between the traditional parish structures of the church and the fraternities.

A Saint Among Us. According to Fr. Bryan's obituary written by Manny Fernandez of the New York Times, hundreds of mourners arrived at the church around the clock to view Father's body as it lay in state in a hardwood coffin. During the bilingual funeral Mass presided by Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, the church was packed. The Times reporter spoke to several parishioners outside on the sidewalk. One man was Jose Gonzalez, who came to the funeral wearing his purple-and-gold Romans sweater. A retired police officer, Mr. Gonzalez said, "I think he saved me from getting into trouble." Next to him sat his old club friend, Mr. Vargas, who has a son named after Fr. Bryan. Mr. Vargas, a retired deputy commissioner of the city's Department of Housing Preservation and development, indicated that he was very thankful to have bumped into Father one day on the street when he was 13 years old. "I wouldn't have had much of a life," he said. "I can say that unequivocally." Mr. Fernandez ends the obituary with the following: "Near the end of the service, Bishop DiMarzio suggested that the monsignor would be a possible candidate for consideration for canonization. The applause was loud and long."



Retta Blaney wrote an article on Fr. Bryan and Transfiguration Church, which was published in the National Catholic Reporter on 3/10/2000. The previous October, Pascual Chico, a parishioner, donated his kidney to Fr. Bryan. Ms. Blaney wrote the following: "To me, it's an honor God chose me to give Fr. Bryan one of my kidneys," said Chico, 59. 'I would not only give him my one kidney, I would give him both of my kidneys so he could live. He is one of the greatest Christians that ever lived, and that includes Mother Teresa and everybody in history. For 43 years a miracle has been happening in our community, and God wants it to keep going.' Chico, who arrived from Puerto Rico 25 years ago, said he has read hundreds of books on Christianity but has learned most from Karvelis. 'He makes Jesus very clear to all of us.'"

Postscript

I would like to thank Jose Dario Perez, the Communications contact for the North American Region Lay Fraternities, for referring me to Alejandro, Ciro, and Little Brother Chepito for interviews. Additionally, I am grateful that Jose provided me a copy of A New Tree Grows in Brooklyn while on a retreat several years ago.

Alejandro Enriquez will be retiring next year from his school job as "Fireman." He operates the boilers as well as has other maintenance responsibilities.

Ciro Ortega does factory work in the daytime and maintenance at night.

Brother Chepito, a Little Brother of the Gospel, originally from the United States, has lived and worked in Nicaragua for the past 45 years.

Brother Jay, a Little Brother of the Gospel, is an activities volunteer at a nursing home outside of Boston.

References

Blaney, Retta. "Urban Contemplatives Open to the World," National Catholic Reporter, March 10, 2000.

Fernandez, Manny. "A Congregation Mourns Its Longtime Shepherd," The New York Times, October 23, 2005.

Desert Ramblings by Arlene Moeller

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the term “communion of saints” refers to “the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven.” I personally have witnessed in my life unforgettable “saintly moments” when the actions of another reminded me that we are indeed members of this communion.

When I was around age five, I recall my brother and I riding in the back seat of our car. My mother, the only adult with us, was driving. We were heading from our upstairs apartment toward downtown Cleveland. Soon my mother pulled over to the side of the road. Looking out the window, I observed a grandma clutching her coat close to her with one hand and holding a shopping bag in the other. She explained to my mom that she needed a ride across the bridge. My mother kindly invited her to step into the car. Now we were on our way across the scary bridge, which looked over factories and a dirty river. After the grandma was dropped off, my mother turned her head and informed my brother and I that it was OK to pick up this stranger because she was nice. This was a saintly moment.

A couple years later, my mother needed to have surgery, so my parents dropped us children off at our maternal grandmother’s home, which was a good distance away. We stayed for about a week. I remember knocking on my grandparents’ bedroom door to request something before going to bed. My grandmother partially opened the door to talk to me. In that moment I glimpsed my grandfather, head down, kneeling in prayer against the other side of the bed. (Thankfully I only saw his undershirt! ☺). It was the first time that I had ever seen an adult, kneeling and praying, inside a home. It was a saintly moment that I will never forget.

I rarely write about my husband, Ken, but I couldn’t pass up writing about this saintly moment. Many years ago my husband and I found ourselves having to drive through a flooded area in California. There was a woman driving slowly across the flood waters in the opposite direction of our car. Her driver window was rolled all the way down. There was a young man in a car behind her who began attempting to pass the lady on her driver’s side. My husband positioned our car in the young man’s path, which would allow the lady to make her way without receiving a tsunami through her car window. Of course, the male driver was not pleased and struck the outside of his driver door with his fist. (At least it wasn’t our car door!)

My daughter, Jaime, was around eight years old when she was playing outside of our apartment complex with several of her friends. They discovered a two-day old kitten all alone in the parking lot and consequently took turns holding and cuddling the newborn. However, since it was nearing dinnertime, her friends began to slowly leave, one by one, which resulted with Jaime solely holding the kitten. When I came out of the apartment to look for Jaime, I observed her in the back parking lot and approached her. Her solemn little face looked up at me while she humbly asked if we could keep the kitten. This was a saintly moment. (I am not Cruella de Vil! Of course, I let her keep the kitten! ☺ In fact, Squeaker lived a long life until he passed away from diabetes.)

Recently, while volunteering at St. Vincent de Paul’s Homeless Desk, I encountered a young woman I had never seen before. She was dressed a little differently than the other people, and she appeared very guarded. The lady explained to me that today was her second visit and indicated that she was not doing very well. In addition to giving the client toiletries and a sack lunch, I provided her with several hand-outs that included referrals for community resources, which included a listing of other places she could find meals. The young woman thanked me. As I stood up to call out the next client, the woman grabbed my hand, knelt, and kissed it. I was very touched by the woman’s expression of gratefulness since no one had ever kissed my hand in this way. Several hours later, I thought, “Jesus kissed my hand today!”

Editor/Circulation:	Arlene Moeller	nalf@moeller2001.com
Responsible for the North American Lay Fraternities:	Heriberto Calderón Möller	hcalderon12@hotmail.com
Communications:	Jose Dario Perez	enlalucha68@gmail.com
Chaplain/Advisor:	Fr. Lennie Tighe	blchdefoucauld@gmail.com

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