

In Memoriam

Father Caskey: A Priest of Principle

Redemptorist missionary, Father John Virgil Caskey, C.Ss.R., remembered as the very dedicated priest who stuck to his principles, died early on the morning of Sunday, May 22, 2011, at the St John Neumann Residence at Stella Maris in Timonium, MD.

Father Caskey was born on August 2, 1917 and professed his first vows exactly 22 years later on August 2, 1939. He was ordained a priest on June 18, 1944 at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY.



He began his ministry as a professor at the Redemptorist seminary in North East, PA where he taught Spanish and Ancient History. However, early in his priesthood he developed serious health problems and had to receive treatments for arthritic and respiratory ailments in Tucson, AZ. These physical concerns prompted his doctors to recommend a more temperate climate. The result was a career of more than 50 years as a missionary in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

“He was my high school teacher,” recalls Father Carlyle Blake, C.Ss.R. “When I returned to St. Thomas many years later, our roles were reversed and I became his pastor for six years. He was always serious-minded. He worked hard and he also enjoyed a good round of golf. He was delighted when I asked him to give conferences to the nuns in the village of Charlotte Amalie. He preached at St. Anne’s Church, which sits on a hill overlooking ‘French Town.’”

“He enjoyed this assignment because he loved working with the people and the fact that there was an 18-hole course nearby,” Father Blake continues. “But what I remember most about him was how dedicated he was to the sick. He visited the hospital daily and — this was so typical of his personality — he covered it thoroughly. If you were in the hospital, you received a visit from Verg.”

In addition to his work in the Virgin Islands, Father Caskey also served for many years in Puerto Rico. Among the communities that received his dedicated ministry were Ponce, Caguas, Fajardo, Aguas Buenas, and Guayama.

“He loved to travel with his family when they took a vacation,” recalls his then vice-provincial superior, Father Tom Travers, C.Ss.R. “But he was also economical in a very ingenious way. For example, he would scour the newspapers in New York for ads searching for people who could chauffeur a car from New York to California. In this way he would take the family on a leisurely excursion to the west coast at a minimal expense and then reverse the process when it was time to return to the city.”

“The people out in the campos of Aguas Buenas really loved him,” continues Travers. “He was patient with them and extremely understanding. And even more so, he learned their customs and wasn’t afraid to immerse himself into the heart of their celebrations. For instance, on January 6, which is a very big feast of the Three Kings there,

the custom is to visit any sick people who are confined to their homes and to bring gifts and play music for them. And Verg would join in this practice by going with the musicians and playing any simple percussion he could manage, even if it was only the Maracas. But he was always with the people and that meant everything to them.”

“Like so many of us, he was easy to live with,” chime in several other confreres who knew him. “As long as you didn’t discuss religion or politics. He lived by the principles of the Catholic Church and he kept to those principles and practices in his daily life.”

“I visited with him just before he died,” recounts his twice provincial, Father Kevin Moley, C.Ss.R. “He had been reading from the bible and was preparing to finish his Liturgy of the Hours for the day. He was exactly at the end of his life as he had been throughout the whole of his Redemptorist priesthood: diligent and prepared.”

“He did good work; parish work and hospital work,” concludes the former San Juan Province archivist, Father John Gauci, C.Ss.R., “so now he may rest in peace.”