

In Memoriam

Father Smyth: Persistent for Christ

Redemptorist missionary, superior, administrator, and pastor Father John Louis Smyth, remembered as a tenaciously hard-working priest, died on November 3, 2011 surrounded by his confreres at their religious community in Stella Maris in Timonium, Maryland.

Father Smyth was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on March 13, 1938 and professed his first vows on August 2, 1959. He was ordained a priest on June 21, 1964. He is survived by his sister, Mrs. Lois Semplice and several nephews and nieces, and was predeceased by his mother, Mrs. Viola Smyth and sister, Mrs. Gail Tometesko.



His first assignments required him to learn Portuguese so that he could minister and preach in Campo Grande, Brazil. He began working in Guaratuba as a young Father in 1966. He continued to serve in South America for the next nineteen years in Ponta Pora, Aquidauana, Tibagi, and Ponta Grossa.

In 1985 he returned to the United States and was appointed to the Baltimore Province Missionary Team. He preached numerous parish missions along the entire east coast from Maine to the Caribbean.

Then in 1995 he was transferred to the Vice-Province of Richmond where he served in St. Francis by the Sea Parish in Hilton Head, SC., Sacred Heart Parish in Griffin, GA., St. James Parish in Concord, NC., St. Alphonsus Retreat Center in Venice, FL., St. Michael's Parish in Wauchula, FL., and Sacred Heart Parish, in New Smyrna Beach. He was the last superior appointed to the Holy Family Retreat House in Hampton, VA. In addition to these varied pastoral responsibilities he also served the Vice-Province in an administrative capacity as a Consultor and Vicar.

When his fellow confrere and classmate, Father Frank Nelson, was asked how he remembered Father Smyth, he replied, "What stands out most in my mind was his deep spirituality. This wasn't always obvious because Father Jack liked to sport a bravado exterior. But the truth is that he made a holy hour every day and never missed his private devotions. I'm sure most folks didn't see this side of him and I doubt that he would want them to. But they did see the fruit of his prayer life — his priestly dedication. People knew there was something special about him and they never forgot him. Even when he was gone from this parish for over 3 years, people asked about him every day. His persistent dedication to the ministry began immediately with his ordination. When he received his assignment to Brazil he practiced the language so much that we used to kid him about being more fluent in Portuguese than in English. He was that good. He always found time for others. He was sensible and prudent and respectful. At Mass he was genuinely conscious that what he was celebrating at the altar was something truly extraordinary. All of this stemmed from his deep and sincere spirituality."

A second classmate, Father James Brennan, agrees. “I think of him as the all-American boy grown up with a crew cut, florid face, and barreled chest. He always gave 110% with great enthusiasm and energy. I heard that after a Cursillo Retreat in Brazil he hugged a man so hard that he nearly broke one of his ribs. That may not be a true story but it fits for my classmate who always went at things wholeheartedly. Father Jack could fill a room with fun and laughter. People liked him. People were drawn to him. And he will be greatly missed.”

“He was an excellent preacher,” remarks his Vice-Provincial superior, Father Jerome Chavarria. “The people loved to come and listen to him because he was straight-forward, no-nonsense, down-to-earth and practical whenever he spoke. He was my superior when I lived in Griffin Georgia and he brought a balanced sense of prayer, work, and humor to our community life. He applied himself to everything he did including his recreation on the fairway greens. Even when he hit an errant golf ball into the ravines he would emerge with renewed determination and a smile. But above all he was actually quite an inspiration without ever intending to be. For example, he never complained about his health issues, even when he broke his back and became paralyzed as a result. I’m sure that his solid prayer life and his devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help gave him the strength and courage to persevere.”

In his own words, Father Smyth once wrote: “Father John Radley had a great influence on me. He used to play ball with us and when the game was over I can still remember him saying, ‘I hope all you boys will be at Mass tomorrow.’ He had the soul of Don Bosco. He gave me a booklet called *Our Lady of Perpetual Help Magazine* that had a fellow shooting a basketball on the cover and inside was a picture of a priest at the Consecration. This gave me a bird’s eye view of community life—the idea of everyone striving toward the same goal. And watching the great work of the Redemptorists helped me to raise my own ideals, to aim a little higher, and to try to be like them. I realize that I have found real happiness in living a community life. The gifts that God and His Blessed Mother shower down upon us will ultimately bring us to our final goal of union with them through the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.”

May his soul be at peace in this union forever.