

## In Memoriam

### Fr. Ray Weithman: A fiery, but gentle mission preacher

Redemptorist Father Raymond Weithman, who worked in the foreign missions and with the mission-preaching bands in the U.S., died of an aneurism Friday, Oct. 16, at the Massachusetts home of a longtime family friend. He was 80 years old and had suffered from poor health for many years.

A Mass of Christian Burial was offered on Tuesday, Oct. 20, at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY, with a fellow missionary to Brazil, Father John Devin, giving the homily and Baltimore Provincial Consultor Father Edmund Faliskie as main celebrant. Burial was at the Redemptorist cemetery in Esopus, where a great-uncle of Father Weithman, Redemptorist Bishop William McCarty of Rapid City, SD, also is buried.

A Brooklyn native, Father Weithman was born June 15, 1929, the son of Raymond and Catherine Dolan Weithman. As a child, he sang in the parish choir and later served at the altar. During his teenage years, he studied at St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA, and, after his novitiate year in Ilchester, MD, he made his first profession of vows in 1951. He continued his preparation for the priesthood at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, making his final profession of vows in 1954 and being ordained a priest on June 17, 1956.

Father Robert Lennon, a year behind Father Weithman in the seminary, recalled the latter's wonderful singing voice. "He sang everything, but especially the Ave Maria and the Panis Angelicus," he said. Father Arthur Wendel also remembered those hymns as being special to Father Weithman and sang them at the funeral Mass. Like many of his classmates, Father Weithman was sent to the foreign missions after ordination. He was assigned to the Campo Grande region of Brazil, where his vocal gift and his appreciation for pitch and tone helped him to become fluent in Portuguese. A classmate and fellow missionary, Father Charles Brinkmann, said that "Brazil was a tremendous part of his career and he loved it there."

From their school days, Father Brinkmann said, Father Weithman was "a faithful and considerate friend, a serious student who prayed hard, worked hard and studied hard. With all his efforts, there were times he seemed to be in another place — out of it, you might say. I think then he was in prayer." Even so, people were not afraid to approach him. "He was very successful in the missions because he was very kind with people and they trusted him and confided in him," Father Brinkmann added.

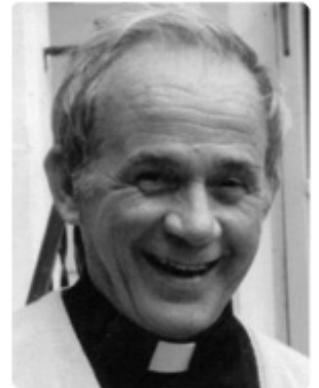
Father Devin said that Father Weithman was known especially for his preaching and the Brazilians appreciated his style, which was "emotional, lively and on fire." He added that his friend was in the habit of walking up and down the aisle as far as his microphone cord would allow: "Sometimes, when he got dramatic, people would duck; they were afraid of getting hit with the mike!"

During his last three years in Brazil, from 1975-78, Father Weithman served as rector of the community at Telemaco Borba, the largest parish the Redemptorists had in Brazil. "It was right next to the largest paper mill in the country," Father Devin said. "So it was a time of expansion of the parish and of building chapels — many, many chapels."

In 1978, Father Weithman was assigned to St. Peter the Apostle Church and St. John Neumann Shrine in Philadelphia; later that year, he was sent, pro tem, to San Alfonso Retreat House in West End, NJ. He continued preaching retreats and parish missions for the remainder of his active ministry. In 1981, he was based at the Redemptorist Provincial Residence in Brooklyn and, in 1982, he worked out of St. Clement Mission House in Ephrata, PA.

Father Weithman was transferred in 1986 to a retreat house the Redemptorists then had in Tobyhanna, PA. In 1988, he returned to Esopus, where the former seminary had become a retreat house. The following year, he was assigned to Mission Church in Boston; he returned to Esopus in 1993.

Most of the missions Father Weithman preached were in English; some, though, were in Portuguese, especially to natives of the Azore Islands. He often teamed with his confrere and fellow missionary, Father John Hennessy, who is ministering still in Brazil.



From the 1990s, Father Weithman suffered from a variety of illnesses and infirmities. When he became too sick to continue in ministry, relatives entrusted a longtime family friend, Pat Napolitano, to take charge of his care.

“Pat and their friend, Angela, were very kind in caring for him,” Father Devin said. Father Weithman was predeceased by his parents and a sister, Catherine Clark. He is survived by a brother, William, and two sisters, Mary Ann Eberhouser and Geraldine Mullin, and numerous nieces and nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.