

## In Memoriam

### Fr. Feeley, a longtime missionary in Puerto Rico, remembered for gentle touch

Redemptorist Father Sylvester Feeley died peacefully on Saturday, Jan. 9, at the Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, with many family members holding and hugging him and his confreres bordering his bedside with prayers. He was 87 years old and, until his hospitalization after Thanksgiving 2009, he continued true to the prayerful and communal rhythm of his Redemptorist life.

A former Vice Provincial of San Juan, Father Feeley was a member of the community at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Basilica in Brooklyn since 1989 and celebrated his golden jubilee of priesthood there in 1998.

A native of Jersey City, NJ, born on May 11, 1922, Father Feeley was the second of six children born to Sylvester and Elizabeth Cox Feeley. He attended parochial school and, during the sixth grade, first met a Redemptorist who was preaching a novena at his parish. After completing grammar school he applied to and was accepted at St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA, where he studied for six years. He made his first profession of vows in 1943 and his final profession, in 1946, during his six years of study at St. Alphonsus Seminary in Esopus. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 20, 1948.



The new priest's first assignment was to Aguas Buenas (1949-1952). He served at the Redemptorist missions in Puerto Rico for 32 years. In 1953, Father Feeley was transferred to Guayama and, in 1960, he returned to Aguas Buenas as rector of the community. He was appointed Vice Provincial of San Juan in 1964.

Father Edwin Foley, a friend of Father Feeley from their school days, said his confrere brought a gift of peacemaking to any conflicts that arose among the confreres. "People came out of conflict situations satisfied that he heard them and understood them," Father Foley said. "He was a priest's priest, not only for our men, but for secular priests."

Father John Hamrogue noted that Father Feeley "began a lot of the renewal of priests in Puerto Rico. He led by example as a gentle man, a gentle priest, a very pleasant man who was always keeping himself up to date. He probably brought in people for the very first Charismatic Renewal there. He was in the forefront pastorally and spiritually."

In 1972, at the conclusion of his second term as Vice Provincial, Father Feeley served one three-year term as rector in Ponce and then two three-year terms as rector of the Guayama community. Father Mark Wise, who served with Father Feeley during his last six years in Puerto Rico and has kept in touch since then, described his confrere as "personable, amiable, a people-person, someone you could easily converse with, a wisdom figure, a mentor. Even when we were in different places, I always felt accompanied by him."

In 1981, Father Feeley returned to the Baltimore Province, residing at the Provincial Residence in Brooklyn while taking up new studies to update himself for the transition from the Puerto Rican culture to that of the continental U.S. At the end of that year, he was assigned to Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baltimore, where he became rector in 1984. Three years later, he was asked to go to Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, NY. His longtime friend Father Foley was there at the same time. "When we were in Canandaigua, the people took to him immediately; they loved him," he said. "I'd prepare my homily as if for a classroom, then I'd take it to him and he'd show me how to make my point in a different way. He'd remind me: 'You have to talk *with* people, not *at* them.'"

At the end of 1989, Father Feeley was assigned to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Brooklyn, where he ministered for his final two decades. Father Joseph Tizio, OLPH pastor, said that everyone loved Father Feeley. Both Father Tizio and Father Hamrogue noted the great number of clergy and laity who came to their confrere for Confession or spiritual direction. While a lot of his time was occupied with "this very holy work," Father Tizio said he

appreciated his practical help as well. For instance, Father Feeley tutored a new parish secretary in Spanish so that she could become confident in translating the Prayer of the Faithful and bulletin announcements from English to Spanish. "I don't know what I'm going to do myself; he was my walking dictionary," Father Tizio said. "Whenever I saw him passing by my door, I could call out, 'What's the Spanish word for...?'"

Father Hamrogue added that Father Feeley's health declined gradually and that he kept adjusting to the effects of aging. "As he retired more from ministry, his devotion to the community never faltered," he said. "Community life remained extremely important to him." So were the very close and warm relationships he enjoyed with his family, he noted.

Predeceased by his parents and brother Robert, Father Feeley is survived by his brother John; two sisters, Elizabeth McCann and Veronica Heagen; a sister-in-law, Helen Feeley; a cousin, James Smith; and a longtime friend, Evlynn Jarzabek, all from New Jersey; nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.