

In Memoriam

Father Crotty: Gods Own Gentleman

Redemptorist Missionary, Superior, Parochial Administrator and Hospital Chaplain, Father Vincent Paul Crotty, remembered by many as a gentleman and as a “gentle” man, died on December 16, 2011 surrounded by his confreres in St. John Neumann Residence at Stella Maris in Timonium, MD.

Fr. Crotty was born in Sayre, Pennsylvania on November 29, 1923 and professed his first vows on August 2, 1944. He was ordained on June 19, 1949. For the first thirteen years of his priesthood he served on the foreign missions in Brazil in Ponta Pora, Campo Grande, Ponta Grossa, and Curitiba. In 1964 he returned to the United States to serve for more than four decades in parish and hospital ministry in Rochester NY; Ephrata, Lancaster, and Tobyhanna PA; Baltimore MD; and in Bethpage on Long Island, NY.



“He was two years ahead of me in the seminary,” recalls his confrere, Father Larry Lover. “I cannot remember even a single instance when Vinnie lost his cool; not even once. And for the avid athlete that he was, that’s saying a lot. Instead he was more soft spoken and laid back. If he disagreed with you, he did so with a mild tone of voice. I know he took care of at least two hospitals — one in Lancaster and one in Bethpage — which I’m sure he covered like a blanket because he was so conscientious in his ministry. He liked everybody and everybody liked him.”

Prior to his ordination, Father Crotty himself wrote:

My calling to the priesthood, and more especially to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, came about in a rather peculiar way... I had never seen a Redemptorist or even heard of them. One day our pastor, Father Houlihan, came into our classroom and asked us what we would like to be in life. Some wished to be doctors, nurses, lawyers, soldiers, and teachers... When he asked if any of us ever thought of becoming a priest, I raised my hand... Later, after consulting with my parents, he recommended that I apply to the Redemptorists where he himself had once studied. I was accepted into their seminary at the age of thirteen, maybe more motivated by their sports facilities than by any religious spirit at first. But that changed as I grew older and more mature.

Those who knew him during his teenage years certainly testify to his love for sports. “He was a good athlete,” recalls his classmate, Father Lawrence Murphy, “and he was very easy to get along with, which is probably why he was appointed a *capo* during our final year at North East. I can’t remember ever seeing him angry. He was a solid person of outstanding character who never looked for the limelight but sort of melted into the crowd. And while he wouldn’t take over a conversation, he wasn’t backward or ill-at-ease either, so everyone felt comfortable around him. You might say he was such a regular person that he could easily be taken for granted. Oh and by the way, he rooted for the Yankees!”

“He was one of God’s gentlemen,” asserts his confrere, Father Carl Hoegerl. “Modesty was the hallmark of all his abilities. And although he was an excellent, natural athlete in baseball, basketball, football, and so on, he would never brag about his talents. He was always pleasant, never ruffled, and there was an air of peace about him. Perhaps that’s why so many people liked him. He was even-tempered and tranquil which was contagious and had a calming effect on those around him. And most importantly, he was a gentle and kindly priest.”

During his assignments on the foreign missions Father Crotty performed both city work and *fazenda* work —

these were outlying districts in the country that he could only reach by horseback once a month or even just once a year because the chapels were so remote. As was the custom, he would send word ahead of time that a priest would be arriving in a few days. Then the people would come to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, Confession, and Communion at Mass. The bishop could only come once every five years for the sacrament of Confirmation. Father Crotty would spend a day or two in one place and then move on to the next. Each celebration ended with a big fiesta — especially when the bishop was there — and the bishop would preach in the evening. Between these pastoral visits it was up to the parents to instruct their children in the faith because there were no deacons or catechists.

During his assignments in the United States Father Crotty pastored inner-city parishes, country parishes, and was frequently able to offer some ministry in Spanish because of his background in Portuguese. Most often there were schools attached to the parishes which opened their doors to at-risk children from low-income families. During his years of hospital chaplaincy Father Crotty visited patients on a daily basis to bring them the grace and comfort of the sacraments along with his own healing presence.

His namesake, St. Vincent Ferrer said, “Whatever you do, think not of yourself, but of God.” Father Crotty certainly personified this epitaph.

The founder of the congregation, St. Alphonsus Liguori, wrote: “God does not wish me to speak of justice and punishments, but of pardon and peace.” Of the many thousands of inspirational thoughts that the Redemptorists inherited from this great saint, it was this quote that Father Crotty chose to highlight during his Golden Jubilee of Ordination in 1999. Those who knew him will agree that Father Vin not only chose these words, but also lived them — every day of his life.

May he rest in the same peace that he brought to so many others. Amen.