

Father Kazimierz Zabawa, C.Ss.R. (1928 - 2012)

By Fr. Mark Miller, C.Ss.R.

On Thursday, Dec. 20th, at St. Mary's Parish in Saskatoon, confreres and parishioners joined Fr. Kaz Zabawa's family members and friends from Winnipeg and Calgary to celebrate a Mass of Christian Resurrection for this gentle, dignified confrere. Fr. Jon Hansen and I drove the next day to Edmonton where we were met by Frs. Tex Keindel, Dino Benedet, Stan Liska, and Bill Bernard (who drove down from Grouard) for the burial. As is so often the case with Prairie cemeteries, Holy Cross had a v e r y cold north wind blowing, so our farewells were short and to the point! Fr. Rajmund Dorawa, who arrived in Western Canada shortly after Fr. Kaz, and remained a good friend was not able to make the funeral because of his continuing knee problems.

Fr. Kaz was born in Lqki Gorne, Poland just eleven years before the Nazis invaded the country. He and his family spent months in the forest evading German forces, surviving on their hunting skills, and living off the land. It was there that Fr. Kaz learned to identify edible wild mushrooms—a feat his confreres did not always trust!

After the war, he joined the Redemptorists, was professed Aug. 2, 1948 and ordained June 19, 1955. He spent over 57 years in priestly service, first, in Poland where, after getting his doctorate, he taught canon law and English at the seminary in Tuchow. At the seminary, he also supplied all the honey as his hobby was beekeeping (a skill he also brought to Canada and shared with his brother's family north of Winnipeg).

In 1978, at the invitation of the provincial of the Edmonton province, Fr. Kaz came to assist us in our communities and our ministry. He spent a year in Calgary at Holy Trinity parish perfecting his English and helping there. Subsequently, he worked at St. Joseph's Parish in Moose and St. Alphonsus' Parish in Winnipeg. In 2002 he retired to St. Mary's Parish in Saskatoon where he was a quiet, but welcome presence helping with confessions, Masses, and various celebrations. He was well loved and respected by parishioners, many in the Polish community, and friends.

Fr. Kaz was in many ways a very private man. His experiences under Communist rule in Poland instilled in him a caution that often seemed out of place in Canada. Nonetheless, I recall my one visit to Poland where I learned that the seminary had at least three seminarians who were spies for the government, while the provincial house, built amid huge delays under the Communist government, was so riddled with microphones that most serious conversations took place in the garden. What I loved about Fr. Kaz, however, was when I would catch him in a certain mood and he would talk – about beekeeping, hunting, fishing, life in Poland, or his brother's family in Winnipeg. He was a fascinating man with a fascinating history. We shall miss his quiet dignity and steady presence in our community.

