

Tidings 2002

by Bishop Sullivan

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Frank Parater

Most people in our diocese never heard of Frank Parater. If you were around in the late Sixties, you might recall that the diocese sponsored a camp named for him in Caroline County called Camp Parater. On Oct. 25, 2001, I received a letter from Jose Cardinal Saraiva Martins, the Prefect of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints authorizing me, with a "*nihil obstat*" ("nothing stands in the way") to initiate a process for the "Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Frank Parater, Seminarian." This past week I appointed Father J. Scott Duarte of our Tribunal to serve as postulator to examine and present all the intricate details of the life of Frank Parater that will be part of the process toward his beatification and, God willing, his canonization.

Francis Joseph Parater was born in a devout Catholic family in Richmond on Oct. 10, 1897. Frank was baptized at St. Patrick's Church on Church Hill. His father was a city employee who also cared for the garden at the Monastery of the Visitation on Church Hill, two blocks from the home site. From the time of his First Communion until he left his home in Richmond for college, Frank served daily Mass at the monastery.

Frank Parater began his education in Richmond at the Xaverian Brothers School and then at Benedictine High School. Growing up, Frank was active in Boy Scouts and in his teens even served as camp director during the summer. Although, small in stature, he received the rank of Eagle Scout. Newspaper accounts note his achievements, his natural talents and his gifts of mind and heart. His vocational choice to study for the priesthood, his journey to Rome, his untimely death and his Last Will and Testament received wide coverage beyond which one might expect.

In 1917, Frank began his studies for the priesthood at Belmont Seminary College in North Carolina. He lived a devout life as he detailed in a journal he kept at Belmont. His stated goal was, "to strive by every possible means to become a

pure and worthy priest, an *Alter Christus*." During this period of his life, Frank drew up for himself a "Rule of Life" which included daily Mass, daily recitation of the Rosary and weekly confession. He had an abiding sense that "the Sacred Heart never fails those who love him".

While in the college seminary, Frank made the decision to study for the diocesan priesthood. He was responding to the great need for priestly ministry in his native Virginia. With this decision, Frank put aside his personal desire for monastic life in favor of direct service to the people of God.

In the fall of 1919, Bishop Denis J. O'Connell, who served as Rector of the North American College in Rome before becoming Bishop of Richmond, sent Frank for theological studies at the North American College. Frank was popular among his peers. He displayed a warm sense of humor. In December of 1919, Frank Parater wrote an "Act of Oblation" to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome to be read only in the event of his death. He wrote:

"I have nothing to leave or give but my life and this I have consecrated to the Sacred Heart to be used as He wills. I have offered my all for the conversion of non-Catholics in Virginia. This is what I live for and in case of my death what I die for. Since my childhood, I wanted to die for God and my neighbor. But if I go on living, every action of my life here is offered to God for the spread and the success of the Catholic Church of Virginia. I shall be of more service to my diocese in heaven than I can ever be here on earth."

The "Act of Oblation to the Sacred Heart" was not discovered until after Frank's death when, on February 7, 1920 a fellow seminarian, Frank Byrne, the late Monsignor Francis J. Byrne of Richmond, went through Frank Parater's effects and found this testament. After its discovery, two popes asked for copies of this "Act of Oblation," which was published in Italian in the *L'Osservatore Romano*.

In late January, 1920, Frank Parater came down with rheumatic fever which caused him tremendous suffering. He received the Last Sacraments in the hospital. With devotion, and unafraid of death, Frank knelt on his bed and received his final communion. He was buried in the College Mausoleum at Campo Santo in Rome.

Bishop O'Connell praised the virtues of the deceased seminarian, later holding Frank Parater as a model for seminarians. My predecessor, Bishop John J. Russell, named the summer camp in Caroline County for him and procured various items from his family which now are preserved in the diocesan archives. After learning more about the heroic virtue and dedication of Frank Parater, I

decided to begin the initial steps toward opening the cause of his beatification and, hopefully, his canonization. The process for beatification and canonization is very involved and thorough. Persons who knew Frank Parater will be interviewed, any writings will be scrutinized and existing records will be analyzed.

Circumstances of his life clearly show that he was a person of exceptional spiritual qualities and exemplary virtue. In his extensive "Rule of Life," Frank Parater wrote: "Be large minded. Don't be a bluffer. Be frank, but be gentle. Love the poor. Make every minute count. Strive to be a man of your ideals. Let your charity be unbounded. Don't be disheartened at failures. Remember the sunny smile with the hearty hand shake is the foundation stone of a successful life."

As bishop, I wholeheartedly support and bless this process of examining the brief but extremely fruitful life on this earth of a son of the Diocese of Richmond.

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