

Province of The Most Holy Name

Franciscan Fathers

135 WEST 31ST STREET

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL NEW YORK CITY 1

October, 1953

My dear Confrere:

First, let me take this opportunity to felicitate Fr. James Keenan on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee in the Priesthood, which was celebrated on August 10. I would like further to congratulate the clerics who made solemn profession on September 17 and the Fathers who were ordained on September 18.

Fr. David Baier, for reasons of health, has found it necessary to terminate his teaching career. I wish to use this means to thank Fr. David for his many years of faithful service.

You will be happy to know that we now have the faculty of imparting all the indulgences to the Franciscan Crown with a single Sign of the Cross. This faculty is enjoyed by every priest in Holy Name Province who was ordained before July 20, 1953.

Concerning Japan, the following appointments have been made to our mission there: Fr. Louis Joyce has been appointed Superior Regular; Frs. Cormac Dungan and Robert Frawley have been named his counselors. As you probably know, the Fathers who have been in Japan for the past year have now completed their Language School and have moved into the missions, ready to go to work. The 5 Fathers who left for Japan in July have arrived there and are now in the Language School.

Word comes to us that, after all arrangements had been completed to get some vehicles to Japan, the law permitting this has been changed and the change made retroactive. Therefore, we are having trouble getting the 2 Jeeps and the Ford car to the Fathers.

You may have wondered what men do for 5 days on a boat. I have the horarium sent to me by one of the Fathers. It goes as follows: Mass at 6 a.m. -- the Fathers serve one another; breakfast at 8; study Japanese for 2 hours, using the records; play badminton, shuffleboard, other deck games; say the Little Hours at 11:30; dinner at noon; more games; reading; rest; Vespers through Lauds before supper; after supper, song fest, Rosary and bed.

Concerning Brazil, there are 6 Friars leaving on October 9: Frs. Paul Seibert, Christopher Neyland, Bernard Trainor and Ignatius Donoghue, and Brothers Anselm Donohue and Denis Clark. Frs. Gregory O'Donnell and Conall O'Leary, who have been in the missions in Brazil, will be assigned to work in the States this year. Frs. Berard McInerney and Edmund Fox are up from Brazil on vacation.

An interesting item concerning transportation in the Brazilian missions is the fact that early this summer Fr. John Francis Granahan was able to get import licenses for 5 Jeeps, 4 Jeep station wagons, 4 Jeep pickup trucks, 3 Ford 1-ton trucks and 1 Ford 5-ton truck. This will renew all the vehicles in Brazil. These vehicles are on their way--some of them have actually arrived. This should give you an idea of the transportation necessities in a place like Brazil, and also an idea of the cost of supporting the missions.

Mexico: American Airlines has a flight called "The Aztec" which leaves LaGuardia at 10:30 p.m. daily for Washington, D. C., Fort Worth,

Tex., and Mexico City. It arrives in Mexico City at 7:40 a.m. which is 9:40 New York time; Mexico City is on Central Standard Time. I reached Mexico City on the morning of September 7 and was met by Frs. Henry Sharp and Christian Sell. We went directly to the Monastery of San Fernando. I offered Mass and then during breakfast I began to get the story of San Fernando. It was filled in from time to time during the few days I was there. Here it is:

San Fernando was originally an Apostolic College for the training of missionaries from Mexico, Texas and California. At one time this monastery housed 150 Friars. It was from San Fernando that Fr. Junipero Serra started his trek to California. Like all churches and monasteries in Mexico, San Fernando felt the persecution which started in the early nineteenth century and has continued to the present time. By 1915 the old monastery had been completely destroyed and the land on which it was built confiscated. There was a large church connected with the monastery which remained standing, although it was stripped. Over a period of years the few Fathers who attempted to continue to serve this church lived with private families. They offered Mass in the morning in the church and led the Rosary there in the evening.

In 1932 it was possible for the Friars to return. At once they began to build up the service, and it was back to normal by 1940. It is now far and away beyond what was then considered normal. Responsible for this is Fr. Henry Sharp.

Here are the statistics that tell the present story: Fr. Henry is Rector of the church and also Procurator for the monastery. The Third Order has been increased to 1,200 members. There is a Nocturnal Adoration Society which has 16 groups of about 35 men each. Regularly every other night in turn some men from these groups go on for Adoration.

It is necessary to have 18 Masses every Sunday. Fr. Henry hears confessions from 5 to 6 hours almost every day.

In 1944, extensive repairs were begun on the church, and each new project in this renovation is initiated as the money is available to pay for it. A great deal has been accomplished; much more remains to be done before it will attain its original splendor. In 1945, work was begun on the present monastery and is still going on. This monastery is attached to the church, and is serviceable but not comfortable.

After breakfast on the seventh, Frs. Henry and Christian and myself did a tour of the city by car and cab--mostly, a tour of old churches. The Friars have 5 churches in the city. We also visited the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is tremendous; a great place for pilgrimage.

Outside of Mexico City is a system of canals where one may ride for hours in a gondola. We watched but did not ride. In the city, where we ate, the meals are priced about the same as they would be in New York, and they are good. At about 7 o'clock the next morning, we were on our way to Yucatan. This state is on the tip of the Mexican peninsula; its capital, Merida, is directly south of New Orleans. We arrived there at about 9:30 a.m., and Fr. Bernardine Ward met us and drove us to his parish in Izamal. This town dates far back, having been at one time the center of the religious activities of the Mayan empire. The Mayas used the pyramid for worship and burial, so there are 12 known pyramids in the Izamal vicinity. On the most prominent of these is built St. Anthony's Church, the parish church of Izamal. It is of mid-sixteenth-century construction, and I can tell you that while it was built to last, it was not built for comfort by our standards.

The story of St. Anthony's of Izamal is to a great extent the story of a statue. In the year 1559, Juan Aguirre, having carved 2 statues of the Blessed Mother, gave one to St. Anthony's in Izamal and the other to St.

Francis' in Merida. Since 1648, after the yellow fever plague on the peninsula, Izamal has been a place of pilgrimage. It happened in this way: The Cathedral Chapter declared the Virgin of Izamal patroness of Yucatan, in thanksgiving for deliverance from the plague. The decision was concurred in by the civil authorities, and there was the promise that a pilgrimage would be made each year. The various parishes of the diocese set their own dates for these devout journeys. It works out to about one pilgrimage a month. Some months have more than this; August 22 is the most popular day.

Early in the nineteenth century, the persecutions started, and the church of St. Francis in Merida was one of the first to be destroyed. Before this happened, however, a family in Merida took and hid the statue of the Blessed Mother that was displayed there. In 1829, a fire started by accident and destroyed the other statue--the one in Izamal. It was then that the statue in hiding in Merida came to Izamal and is still there.

The inhabitants of Izamal are jealous of their statue. It has been moved to Merida 3 times for short periods, and each time over the protest of the Izamalians. On the last of these occasions, they permitted the statue to be moved, on the condition that they be allowed to hold the Guardian of the Monastery as a hostage until it was returned. He was under guard for 3 weeks.

During the persecutions in the early 1930's, St. Anthony's was stripped but not razed. Shortly before the soldiers came, someone took the statue to a place of concealment. The church and monastery at Izamal were long used as a garrison for troops. The church is now well along in the process of renovation and redecoration. It is interesting to walk along the aisles and read the inscriptions on the tombstones of those buried beneath the church. Fr. Bernardine Ward is pastor here, and in addition there were until recently 2 other priests and 2 Brothers. However, Fr. Christian Sell, one of the priests, moved to Western Mexico, near Guadalajara, where he will have a parish in a farming community, and will attempt to teach more modern agricultural methods to his parishioners.

At Izamal these Fathers serve St. Anthony's, which is the only church. They also give religious instruction at 5 little chapels on the perimeter of the town, and serve 5 small towns in the vicinity (20-30 miles). These Fathers have charge of the Third Order for the entire diocese. They are quite busy.

In Izamal, I ran into something unusual in sleeping equipment--an old-fashioned hammock--not too bad, but not too comfortable either.

We left Izamal around noon on Thursday, September 10, drove to Merida, flew from Merida to Mexico City, and arrived there just about in time to have some lunch, clear Customs, and catch the return trip on "The Aztec" which leaves Mexico City at 9:30 each evening and arrives in New York at 10:50 the next morning.

More information on Personnel: It has been necessary to make another change concerning the "Provincial Annals." Fr. Alcuin Shields' health is not up to his doing the work, so the "Annals" will be handled by Fr. Claude Kean, with the help of the clerics at Rye Beach.

Fr. Gratian Feltz will remain at Paterson; Fr. Alphonse Trabold will go to Croghan instead of to Wilkes-Barre.

We have some more news concerning the Chaplains: Fr. Gordian Ehrbacher has orders transferring him from the Battleship "New Jersey" to Parris Island Marine Base, where he will be Senior Chaplain. Fr. Raymond Beane has been doing a short tour of duty in the Arctic and will return home in late October or early November. Fr. Finbar Dowd is on his way to the West Coast; it looks as if he may be on his way to the Orient. Fr. Giles

Webster said Mass for the first load of prisoners to leave Inchon for the United States. Fr. Cormac Walsh is back in this country, having accompanied repatriated prisoners of war; Fr. Timothy Quinn is expected home on another POW ship. Fr. Sebastian McKenna is being transferred from Japan to Okinawa. Fr. Barnabas Daniels went direct to an Air Force Base; Fr. Denis Anderson is attending Chaplain's School.

On August 11, there was the ceremony of blessing the house at Rye Beach, with Fr. Michael Harding as Master of Ceremonies, and Fr. Alcuin Shields as his assistant. A Solemn High Mass was then sung by the clerics. So Rye Beach is officially open. It now has 2 classes of clerics, first- and second-year students in philosophy, and the school is under way.

I have been receiving repeated requests for information concerning FRIAR. You will find below a note given me by Fr. Rudolph. I think this contains the information you have been seeking:

"Physically, FRIAR will be 8½ by 5½ inches, and will run to about 50 pages. It will, therefore, be a very little bit larger than the TABULA, but much less interesting; it is the exact size of INTEGRITY. The cover, a blown-up facsimile of which is on the placards, will change in color each month. The price will be 35c per copy, \$3 a year (\$5 for foreign mailing), and \$5 domestic 2 years.

"The 150,000 subscription envelopes now in use provide for multiple gift subscriptions and the direct mail appeal will emphasize Christmas gift subscriptions.

"Formally, FRIAR will be a constant effort at getting the lyricism of Franciscanism frozen into print. It will be consistently Franciscan in theme and ultimately, we hope, in contributors. At present we have excellent material from Frs. Thomas Plassmann, Valentine Long, Isidore O'Brien and Claude Kean; while other facile pens in the Province have promised to write, or are now writing, on assigned topics. Fr. Gillis and Bishop Sheen are magic names which I felt were needed to help lift the project off the ground, but the over-all aim is to publish Franciscan manuscripts. I wish you would make it a point in your letter to stress our present and urgent need of material from every competent writer in the Province. We could have no better subsidy in beginning this work than a list of competent volunteers to serve as associate editors writing on assigned subjects.

"FRIAR will be literate but not literary, solid but not stuffy. The 3 feature articles each month will be human-interest treatments of moral and dogmatic matters of vital and current interest, and the savoring of the stew will be a Franciscan optimism and practicality. There will be an editorial, a Question and Answer department conducted by Fr. Callistus, a Correspondence Page, a Book Review for the unacademic, pieces on our missions and the Third Order, Franciscan Quotabilia, profiles of personages ensouled with the spirit of St. Francis, and reports concerning the Franciscan Apostolate of the Way of the Cross."

With kind regards to all the Friars, and asking continued prayers for the Definitorium and myself for the successful administration of the Province, I remain

Sincerely and fraternally,

Clasius E. Whelan, ofm

Minister Provincial