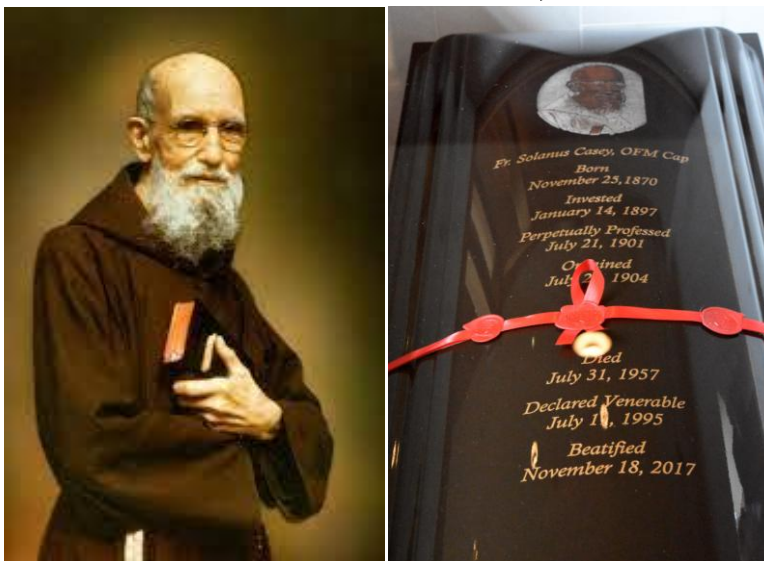


REGIONAL FORMATION: SUMMER STUDY ON FRANCISCAN SAINTS

BLESSED SOLANUS CASEY, OFM CAPUCHIN



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Born Bernard Francis Casey (nicknamed “Barney”) on November 25, 1870 in Oak Grove, WI, after his investiture in the Capuchin habit he received the name Francis Solanus Casey in honor of the violin-playing Spanish Franciscan who worked in South America in the seventeenth century. He was the sixth of sixteen children born to Irish immigrants Bernard James Casey and Ellen Elizabeth Murphy. Two of his brothers and a nephew also became priests. He was an extremely humble friar who received countless visitors in his lifetime and listened to their needs. For all miracles attributed to him during his lifetime, he took no credit but gave all glory to God. He always encouraged people to give thanks to God before (when asking for a favor) and always thank God after the favor was granted.

By merely human standards, the life of Solanus Casey was no great success story. He was a mediocre student who couldn’t keep up in a diocesan seminary and he barely made it through the Capuchin Friars Seminary. When he was finally ordained, he was made a “simplex priest” – one who was not allowed to hear confessions or preach doctrinal sermons. So, Solanus Casey spent

fifty-three years in lowly service as a sacristan and doorkeeper. Nevertheless, he graciously accepted this humble station in life, and God rewarded him with a remarkable ministry of spiritual counsel and divine healings. He dramatically transformed thousands of lives. He had a great love for the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart, Blessed Mother Mary, the poor souls, and the book, *The Mystical City of God* by Mary of Agreda. Immediately prior to taking his last breath, July 31, 1957, he opened his eyes, stretched out his arms as though greeting an old friend, and said, "I give my soul to Jesus Christ." After his death, thousands of miracles continued as while he was living. His remains were exhumed sixty years after his death; his body was found to be incorrupt. Blessed Solanus Casey's casket is in the north transept of the St. Bonaventure Monastery chapel at the Solanus Casey Center in Detroit.

The Practice of Virtues by Blessed Solanus Casey

The Theological Virtues: In Solanus Casey's eyes, the "triune virtues" of faith, hope, and charity were "essentially one" because they revealed the "trace of the Holy Trinity in our immortal souls." Love, faith, and trust were the three points that he preached to the people at all times. But not only did he preach these theological virtues; in his own life there was the consistency in his extraordinary practice of faith, hope, and charity.

Works of Mercy: Although references to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, as such, cannot be found among his writings, the whole life of Solanus Casey testifies that he admonished sinners, instructed the ignorant, counseled the doubtful, comforted the sorrowing, bore wrongs patiently, forgave all injuries, prayed for the living and the dead, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, gave drink to the thirsty, visited the imprisoned, sheltered the homeless, visited the sick, and buried the dead.

The Cardinal Virtues: The cardinal virtues of prudence, justice (toward God and human beings), fortitude, and temperance were not elaborated in his writings, but, his life manifested each virtue quite clearly.

The Evangelical Counsels: Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and Humility: Solanus Casey's fidelity to his vow of poverty can be found in his own personal simplicity of life and in his commitment to the poor themselves. His approach of relating to all people was very evident in the way he exercised his vow of chastity. Respect for himself and his vocation as a Capuchin Franciscan and as a priest grounded his life of chastity and was translated in the way he related to others. For Solanus, obedience represented "the master stroke in the sacrifice of self to God's service." Solanus's obedience and submission to all forms of authority began with his desire to do the will of God and obey God in all things. Among the many virtues attributed to Solanus Casey, humility ranks among the most notable. In the opinion of some witnesses, humility did become the virtue from which "all other virtues worthwhile in God's sight took root and nourishment" in Solanus's life.

How Blessed Solanus Casey's life influences me as a Secular Franciscan

I first heard of Solanus Casey as an adult while in Medjugorje (1989.) I learned that he was a holy Franciscan Capuchin friar who was a doorkeeper or porter at a monastery; he was an intercessor for many miracles. I later learned that he was so much more. Even being assigned as a doorkeeper, he did not complain, but accepted as God's will for him. Solanus was consistent in the practice of virtues; it was part of his very life. He set examples for us and, if we follow these, we can be assured that we are truly walking in the steps of Francis of Assisi.

How Blessed Solanus Casey's life may guide us in our Secular Franciscan Fraternities

I encourage everyone in the St. Clare Region to read at least one book about Blessed Solanus Casey. A trip to Detroit's Solanus Casey Center housed in the St. Bonaventure Capuchin Monastery would be a blessing! One of his superiors, Bernard Burke, OFM, Capuchin aptly expressed the extraordinary way Solanus lived his ordinary life:

“It is rather difficult to pinpoint specific examples of Father Solanus's practice of virtue, whether it be humility, obedience, or anything else. And perhaps this is one of the significant points that shows his practice of virtue because he did not make himself stand out in spite of the fact that he was well-known and credited even then with miracles, or at least healings and cures. But he never pointed to himself as being outstanding because of these things. He was one of the members of the community, and he subjected himself to the rules and regulations of the community. So, in that sense, he was not outstanding. Perhaps this in itself is, as I say, a sign of his great practice of his virtues.”