

## Miracle Worker

### A true Prescott original!

He was born in November of 1870, in Prescott, not too far from the bigger and better-known town of Hudson. In the summer of 1957, his funeral would be attended by thousands. While Solanus Casey is best known as the humble porter of St. Bonaventure Capuchin Franciscan friary in Detroit, the man God chose as His instrument in the working of many miracles began life humbly in the wilds of western Wisconsin.

Called "Barney" after his father, Solanus Casey came from a large, Catholic family. Young Barney and his brothers wandered the woods on the Wisconsin bank of the Mississippi, hunting quail, rabbits, and deer. They also fished, which helped feed the family. Barney loved baseball, and took up the violin- an instrument his brothers uncharitably advised him practice out in the barn. While his father was a good provider, there was difficulty and hardship too. Crops failed. Diphtheria struck, taking two of Barney's brothers with it, and permanently damaging his voice.

So the young man from Prescott was already quite familiar with the reality of human suffering when he witnessed, as a trolley conductor in Superior, a particularly brutal scene that stayed with him for the rest of his life. A woman lay bleeding on the tracks, while a drunken man wielding a knife towered over her, cursing obscenely. In the words of Father Solanus' biographer James Patrick Derum, Barney Casey "began to pray for the woman and her assailant, and realized while praying that he must pray for the whole world. He saw as in a white light that the only cure for mankind's crime and wretchedness was the love that can be learned only from and through Him who died to show men what love is." It was at this point that Barney Casey fully realized, and acted upon, his vocation to become a priest.

As a Capuchin, Casey was given the religious name "Francis Solanus," after a Spanish nobleman who had been a brilliant preacher and missionary in the 17th century South America. Solanus Casey, in contrast, was not considered brilliant. A mediocre student, he became a "simplex" priest with limited faculties. He was given- and made no complaint about being given- the humdrum task of greeting visitors at the door of the friary, and of offering to enroll them in the Seraphic Mass Association (SMA).

And enroll them Father Solanus did, after listening with patience to their various complaints and then offering a few words of consolation and spiritual advice. Very soon unexplainable things, miraculous things, began to happen. People began flocking to the humble priest to whom amazing cures and conversions were increasingly being attributed.



Paralysis, cancer, gall stones, and deafness- along with alcoholism, unbelief, financial collapse, and suicidal temptations- fill the pages of the notebooks that Solanus Casey kept for decades, at the request of his religious superiors. His scribbled and incomplete notations tell the story of the whole catalogue of human misery in this vale of tears, and of the intervention of God's healing love in every area.

Some examples read:

"Dec. 29, 1937 - John Charles Kulbacki-6- blind... On Christmas Day, while at 'Crib' here at church, was almost frightened as he exclaimed, pointing to the lighted crib, 'Look, Mama!'"

"Jan. 7, 1945 - Robert Hamilton-44-Enrolled last Wednesday expecting brain tumor operation on Friday. Drs. who had x-rayed his head were

astounded at finding no tumor at all... Feb. 25, 1945-Patient here today 100% well."

"July 2, 1924 - Michael F. - has been to Confession and Communion three times (since being enrolled in the Seraphic Mass Association). When asked why he went into church first time after such an absence, answered, 'I don't know.'"

"Dec. 9, 1932 - Doraine Innes-8-of Montreal. At 4 had meningitis of brain- then paralysis and curvature of spine and cross-eyed. Enrolled in 1930. Since day of enrollment has been able to walk with crutches."

"Sept. 27, 1924-Leo W.- consumption, in Marine Hospital. Refuses this p.m. to listen to talk of going to confession- angry at the proposal of his sister that he do so. Enrolled in SMA after fruitless efforts lasting a year.

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## Solanus

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Oct. 1- Happy and appreciative, receives everything (Confession, Holy Communion, and Extreme Enction). Happy death, Oct. 4, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi."

In August of 1956, a young novice got to know Father Solanus at St. Bonaventure's in Detroit. That novice is now Father Dan Crosby, OFM Cap., the director of St. Anthony Retreat Center in Marathon. "I lived with Father Solanus from August until mid-March of his last year of life," Father Crosby recalls. "Everyone knew he had a reputation for holiness, and everyone knew he had a reputation for holiness, and everyone could vouch for the fact that it was genuine." Father

Crosby recalls that Father Solanus was often in chapel "way before the earliest of risers."

The word Father Crosby remembers "most vividly" coming from Father Solanus' lips was "appreciate." "If only we'd appreciate the faith; if only we'd appreciate one another; he'd say. It has forever changed my understanding of the depth of what God has given us," Father Crosby said. Father Solanus taught him that "the faith is not an intellectual thing, but rather, affects us at the depths of our being. All we have to do is let it in, savor it, love it."

Father Crosby particularly recalls an experience in the eve of what proved to be Father Solanus' last Christmas on earth. "On my way to rec-

reation on Christmas Eve," he said, "I made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Our chapel in Detroit was joined to a larger chapel for the public. I heard a squeaky noise coming from the larger chapel. I knew what it was, of course, but I wanted to see for myself."

So he looked. There in the choir lost was Father Solanus Casey, playing Christmas hymns on the violin to the new-born Christ in His crib.

