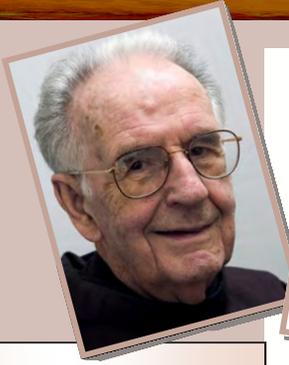


SISTER DEATH



A REFLECTION ON HIS FRANCISCAN LIFE (1994)

by Fr. Peter Sheridan, OFM

I was a freshman at Seton Hall University in 1932, preparing to take a pre-med course, when someone gave me a book to read on St. Francis of Assisi. That started me thinking seriously about the Franciscan way of life. At the time, I didn't know any friars. The following year, I made a trip to St. Francis Church in New York to visit the Franciscans.

Fr. Edmund Murphy, OFM, met me and suggested we do our talking over a cup of coffee. Not long afterwards, Fr. Mathias Faust, OFM, Provincial of Holy Name Province at the time, joined us. Our talk centered on Franciscan life as a priest or brother. I was touched to think the Provincial took time out of his busy schedule to meet with me. As a result of my visit, I applied to the seminary.

In the more than 50 years since my ordination, I have worked in a number of ministries. Twenty years were spent in our southern missions. My first assignment was as assistant in our Franciscan parish in Lenoir, in western North Carolina. Shortly after my arrival, the pastor and I paid a visit to the bishop of Raleigh, who told us that the history of the Church in the South was a sad one. Because of a lack of priests and churches, many Catholics were unable to persevere in their faith. The area assigned to our care was eight mountain counties with an estimated population of 130,000 of whom only about 100 were Catholics.

The pastor offered Mass on Sundays in Lenoir for about 40 people. My schedule called for a 100-mile round trip with three stops for Masses. The average attendance for the Masses, usually in homes, was about 25. During the week, I made trips to instruct children and to conduct adult study groups. For a few years I offered Mass in the office of the Holy Mountain Hatchery in Wilkesboro, NC, for some 10 people.

In 1952, the Province assumed pastoral care of eight counties in the southwest corner of Georgia. I was named pastor of St. Augustine Church in Thomasville, as the center for the friars' parochial outreach. The Province opened a new novitiate house in 1955, St. Raphael's, in Lafayette, NJ, the fulfillment of a dream for Fr. John Forest Loviner of St. Anthony's Guild. I was novice master for nine years until 1964. Over the next 20 years, I served as provincial councilor, hospital chaplain and did further ministry in Georgia.

Since 1976, it has been a rewarding experience for me to work with a number of Secular Franciscan fraternities in Maryland and Virginia. They have helped me to deepen my commitment to the ideas and ideals of St. Francis. Their abiding love for the Church and their loyalty to her have impressed me. They are serious about living their profession which binds them more intimately to the Church, as their Rule declares, and calls them to go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people in proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

As part of my golden jubilee of ordination, I visited the places in the South I had cared for as a young priest. In towns where I had offered Mass for a few Catholics in homes, today there are churches and resident pastors. Boone, NC, where I had offered Mass in the home of Edna and Maurice O'Sullivan, the only resident Catholics, has a Catholic population today of over 360, a church and a pastor. Recalling the words of the Raleigh bishop, I realized that our Franciscan presence to so few Catholics years ago preserved a community ready to greet the influx of Catholics to the South as part of the Sun-belt Movement of the '70s and '80s. I am grateful to God for my Franciscan vocation that gave me an opportunity to share in the life of the Church and our Province these 50-plus years.

FR. PETER SHERIDAN, OFM

died November 3, 2010 at Holy Name Friary. The 97-year-old was senior friar by religious profession of Holy Name Province.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. Anthony Church, in Butler, NJ. Provincial Vicar Dominic Monti, OFM, was principal celebrant and homilist. Interment followed at Mount Calvary Cemetery in Butler.

Fr. Sheridan had recently celebrated 75 years as a Franciscan earlier this year, was a priest for 59 years, and had been recognized in the *TAU-USA* magazine under the *Classic Franciscan* section, Fall 2010 issue, pg 23.

Since his biography was published in the last issue of *TAU-USA*, we offer you this article penned by Fr. Peter. It appeared in the '94 March issue of *The Anthonian* titled: *Journeys to Franciscan Life*, where he reflects on his life as a Franciscan. —Editor

