

Mass of the Resurrection
Fr. Stephen Quinn, S.T.
St. Joseph Shrine, Stirling, N.J.
November 28, 2009

Homily

Conrad Schmitt, S.T.

Andrew Quinn was born in Buffalo, N.Y., on July 22, 1917, the son of Francis Joseph Quinn and Laura Bridgett Thompson. He attended Nativity School and the Little Seminary of St. Joseph and St. Theresa in Buffalo. It was there that he was inspired by a talk by one of our priests about the work of the Missionary Servants among the poor and neglected, especially in small places in the Southern United States. In response to the vocation he felt he entered the Novitiate of the Missionary Servants (taking the religious name: Stephen), in Holy Trinity, Alabama, just six years after the establishment of the Order and two years after the death of the Founder, Father Thomas Augustine Judge. He was ordained a priest in Washington, D.C., on May 18, 1944.

During all of his training, Father Stephen's dream of serving the Triune God by ministering to people on an individual basis was strengthened and deepened. At that time there were few Missionary Servant priests and his ordination class offered a significant number of new missionaries for the extension of the ideals of Father Judge in new and broader pastoral situations.

At their ordination, the members of that class were called in for their new assignments. They were eager to see to which missions they would be sent. Father Vincent Fitzpatrick, a close friend of Father Stephen's was called in just before lunch. He was told that he would be sent for Classical Studies and would eventually receive teaching assignments. Father Stephen kidded him about this, assuring him he would keep in contact with him from the missions.

After lunch, Father Stephen was called in and told he would be studying Canon Law –and subsequently teaching. It took more than one afternoon for Father Vincent to repay the kidding.

The incident tells much about what made Father Stephen who he was, and his ability to relate to so many people: He had a dream. Yet, when called, as he believed, by God, through the ordinary manifestations the Good Lord uses, he accepted that as the clearer vision for himself and surrendered to what he knew to be for him the Will of God.

And so he studied Canon Law and taught it at the Seminaries in Silver Spring and Winchester (VA.). Although he did not feel he was gifted in the area of administration (which proved wrong) he accepted the call to be superior and rector of those seminaries. We who were blessed by his teaching and guidance in our seminary days remember a man who dealt with us as individuals, who accepted our strengths and assuring us that both of these could serve the Lord.

Because of their experience of him as teacher, scholar, holy man, and spiritual guide, his confreres' elected him first as Vicar General and then as Custodian General (Superior General) of the Missionary Servants. The terms he spent in those offices were difficult times for the Church, the Religious Life and the Missionary Servants. They were times of upheaval, change, and confusion. Times when people were looking for causes and cures, none of which was evident, none agreed on by all. And, as is usual in such situations, blame, expectations, unreasonable hopes and personal disappointments were heaped on those in office. Father Stephen shouldered all of these at personal suffering and sacrifice, and with quiet grace. In the midst of all that, we experienced the warmth and personal interest with which he related to each of us individually. He steered the Congregation through the rough waters consequent upon Vatican II and the impact it had on Religious life and pastoral ministry.

He was for all of us the anchor that kept us moored to the past, the rock that helped us survive that present, and the hope that made today possible. It was he who, in the midst of all of that, was able to lay the foundation that enabled the Missionary Servants to enter the post-Vatican II era. Those who had the ministry of authority in those days appreciated his support and prayerful presence. All of us now in this subsequent era of the Church and our Congregation have felt that same support and that same deep spiritual confidence in the possibilities and future of the Cenacle Ideal.

Through retreats, individual spiritual guidance, and counsel to their leaderships, Father Stephen helped the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity, the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate and the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute, continue their growth in the charism of Father Judge, Mother Boniface, Doctor Healy. With Sister Mary Gerald he initiated the Joint Councils, which later developed into the Family Councils, and developed administrative and spiritual cooperation between the Branches. Together they provided the impetus and support for the revised Constitutions, and the Rule of Life. Father Stephen also inspired and made the initial contributions to the Missionary Cenacle Spiritual Exercises. All of these have had so impacted our Congregation and the whole Cenacle Family, that they have shaped the future of the Missionary Cenacle.

As his life in administration was coming to an end he and I often reminisced about the past and reflected on the future. He observed that, after all the years in administration, he hoped he would finally be able to pursue the dream that began long ago in Buffalo: to work with the spiritually needy person on the on-to-one basis which we both felt is the heart of the Cenacle style of mission. I asked him where he thought that could be. He said, "I've thought about it and I think I would like to go to the Shrine." It was a privilege to help him fulfill that desire, on November 5, 1980.

It was here at the Shrine that Father Stephen had been his happiest, because here he had fulfilled the hopes he had kept in his heart all those years. Each of us today cherishes the way he has touched our own lives, last night's reflections showed the ways he touched the lives of others:

In our local Missionary Servant community, we have valued his counsel, his support, and personal encouragement in our own service to God's people.

He reassured those who came to him for the Sacrament of Reconciliation that they had God's forgiveness – and helped them come to that most important step: the forgiveness of self.

With those who came for spiritual counseling, he spoke of the ways of drawing closer to God by listening for and following the Lord's invitations.

Through the sharing of his own experience, strength and hope with those in recovery and twelve-step programs, he counseled patience and perseverance, personally witnessing that one step at a time leads down a beautiful road.

Clergy and Religious found in him a wise and prudent friend who could speak to them from his own living of the Religious Life and Priesthood.

Father Stephen was able to radiate such serenity, peace and warmth because he was a man of prayer: we all witnessed his fidelity and devotion in the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. In his personal prayer life, we saw a true contemplative in action.

In that spirit, we now pray to the Triune God in gratitude for the life and ministry of Father Stephen Quinn by offering the prayer he loved so much: Jesus' own prayer of thanksgiving, the Holy Eucharist.