

Brother Leon (Raymond) Beranek, O.F.M.

August 21, 1934 – June 22, 2016

Amid songs, prayer, and psalms, the angelic hosts from on high brought our Brother Leon Beranek, O.F.M. to the glory of heaven in Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, Elmhurst, Illinois on Wednesday June 22, 2016 at 5:53 pm, at the age of 81. He died peacefully with family and friars present. He spent just over two days in the hospital after having been taken there by ambulance from Westchester Health and Rehabilitation Center, Westchester, Illinois. He had aspirated a large amount of food into his lungs. His living will stated that he wished not to have his life unnecessarily extended by artificial or undue cumbersome measures.

Brother Leon, or “Uncle Ray,” as his many nieces and nephews called him, was blessed to have his sister, Maryanna Petzel, four of her daughters, and four of their children present from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm on Tuesday when the doctors removed the breathing tube. “Uncle Ray” continued to breathe peacefully for about 27 hours.

Brother Leon had spent several weeks in the Hines VA Hospital, Maywood, Illinois during the months of February and March. He had fallen several times in the friary and at restaurants during the previous several weeks. He went from the VA Hospital to the Westchester Health and Rehabilitation Center on March 23, 2016. His time there was pleasant and happy, except when he was plotting to “escape” and get back to St. Gratian’s. The staff was often delighted when watching Leon’s shenanigans in his attempts to sneak past them. The Westchester location was great for the friars at St. Gratian’s. It was only about a twelve minute drive from the friary. The friars would write in a book at St. Gratian’s what they observed and experienced when they visited Leon. Leon was there three days short of three months.

Raymond Beranek was born August 21, 1934 to Anton and Alma (Lyons) Beranek in the parish of St. Nicholas of Tolentine, in Chicago, Illinois. His obituary in the Chicago Tribune, Sunday, July 24, 2016 stated:

“Loving brother to Maryanna Petzel (The late William), Joseph Beranek, Clare (Russel) Markle, Thomas Beranek (the late Marion), and of deceased siblings: Constance Beranek, Patricia (Anthony) Vlach, and James Beranek. Fond Uncle of many nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews, and great, great nieces and nephews. Exemplary Franciscan Religious Brother to the Friars of the Sacred heart Province, St. Louis, Missouri and of St. Gratian Friary, Countryside, Illinois. Caring brother to the many homeless and poor of Chicago at Franciscan Outreach. Served in the Army. Memorial Mass at 11:00 am, Wednesday, July 27, 2016, Mayslake Village Chapel, 1801 W. 35 St., Oak Brook, Illinois. Burial after cremains returned at Queen of Heaven Cemetery, Hillside, Illinois. “

His holy card details Brother Leon’s life with the following:

Born, Chicago, Illinois

Served in the Army 1955 – 1957

At the age of 30, entered St. Paschal’s Franciscan Brothers’ School, Oak Brook, Illinois, 1964, learning the trade of electrician, received into the Franciscan Novitiate, Teutopolis, Illinois, August 12, 1967.

Professed Solemn Vows, Chicago, Illinois, September 2, 1973

Maintenance work:

St. Paschal's Friary, Oak brook, Illinois, 1968
Holy Childhood Parish, Harbor Springs, Michigan, 1969
Our Lady of Angels Seminary, Quincy, Illinois 1971
St. Peter's Church, Chicago, Illinois, 1975
Padua Franciscan High School, Parma Ohio, 1976

Bookkeeper:

Franciscan Missionary Union, St. Augustine, Chicago, Illinois 1977
Franciscan Herald Press, St. Augustine, Chicago, Illinois 1987
Vicar, St. Dominic Friary, Chicago, Illinois 1990 – 1993
Franciscan Outreach, Chicago, Illinois 1991 – 2008

Lived:

St. Gratian Friary, Countryside, Illinois 1993 – 2016

Died:

Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, Elmhurst, Illinois, June 22, 2016
Donated his body to science
Burial at Queen of Heaven Cemetery, Hillside, Illinois

Since Brother Leon donated his body to science, the Memorial Mass was scheduled after some relatives could arrive from out of state. Friars and family began gathering at the Mayslake Village Chapel lobby area, at 10:00 am on Wednesday, July 27, 2016. They shared stories of "Uncle Ray" as they looked at two tables filled with pictures and memorabilia.

Mass was celebrated at 11:00 am, with Father Michael Jennrich, O.F.M., Provincial Vicar, as the principal celebrant and Father Dennis Koopman, O.F.M., concelebrant and homilist. After the opening hymn, Kathy Gornik, niece of Brother Leon, gave the eulogy. In her presentation Kathy stated:

"We have come together to honor and celebrate God's dear son. He has many names, Brother Leon to the Franciscan Friars, Raymond to his mother, who is deceased, Ray to his brothers, sisters and friends, and "Uncle Ray" to his many, many nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews, and great, great nieces and nephews. He became a devoted Franciscan Brother who truly followed in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. He was a humble, loving, kind and peaceful man of God. He took care of his beloved mother with tender loving care.

"Uncle Ray" loved to celebrate life, especially all the family parties. One could always count on a \$10.00 bill in your birthday card from him. He loved to celebrate graduations, baptisms, first holy communions, confirmations, weddings and all holidays. Every Easter he would bring the lamb cake. He especially loved Christmas. In fact he and his mother would keep most of the Christmas decorations up all year. He celebrated all of these with his loving sister, Maryanna and her family, and with his dear brother, Del and his family.

"Uncle Ray" loved to drive and he made many car trips to see his sister Patsy and her family in Omaha, and his sister Clare and her family in Pennsylvania. He appreciated it when his sister Patsy moved into

their mother's home to help him care for her. He loved to take family members on tours of the old neighborhood. He really loved his family, and all the family felt his love.

A favorite and often shared family memory was when at a party for two of his nieces, Natasha and Sarah, who were about 11 and 12, were listening to their favorite singer Madonna. They were playing her song, "Like a Virgin." "Uncle Ray's" mother asked what they were singing. "Uncle Ray" said that they were singing, "Like a Sturgeon." Through the years, we've all had a good laugh about that.

My favorite memory of "Uncle Ray" happened when I was about 8 years old. He had a job driving a big yellow school bus and he came to our house and took me, just me, for a ride. It was nighttime and snowing. Everything was sparkling white. It was just magical.

As we all know, he loved "Dunkin Donuts Day." Once a week, for years, he'd pick up his sister, Maryanna, and drive to "D.D." His favorites were a long john or a jelly bismark with hot chocolate. A lot of us became a part of the "the D.D. posse," including my brother Tommy, my husband Len, and many of the family. That was an hour or two of just "chewing the fat," as he used to say. When his nephew Jayden, who is six years old, heard that his great, great uncle passed away, he said, "It was all of those donuts that he ate!"

After eating donuts, "Uncle Ray" and Maryanna would go on a "tour" of the city, and then return to Maryanna's for a restful nap. After watching Wheel of Fortune on TV, they would go out to dinner. Oh, yes, he loved going out to eat. He shared many meals with Maryanna and his brother Del. Uncle Del would often bring "Whiteys," White Castles, for lunch to Maryanna's for the three of them to share. They loved their "little brother." All of the family shared a deep love for one another.

We, his family, are so grateful to all of the dear Franciscans, his spiritual family. You were by his side in life, in sickness and at the moment of his death praising God and making a joyful noise unto the Lord. You were praying for his protection and safe passage to God in heaven. Those were precious moments and so comforting for us and will not be forgotten.

Brother Leon, Raymond, Ray, "Uncle Ray" served God, his Franciscan Order, his family, and his country with humility, love, and honor. We are all grateful to have had this holy man in our lives. We love you and we miss you!"

After the eulogy everyone was invited to share phrases and stories of memories concerning "Uncle Ray," Brother Leon. Del Beranek, Leon's brother, shared how he enjoyed Ray's many visits to his house and his presence at the family gatherings.

Many others of the family also shared with those gathered how they remembered the joy that "Uncle Ray" brought to their gatherings and celebrations. Many also reiterated how "Uncle Ray" loved to eat. They shared that he would remember their birthdays, and would always ask how the young family members were doing.

Friars shared how Brother Leon would always ask if anyone wanted to go out to eat, especially at lunch time at the Franciscan Outreach. Father Larry Janezic, O.F.M., then director of Franciscan Outreach, remembered that Brother Leon, treasurer at Franciscan Outreach, would ask every morning if there was any money to go into the bank account. He would follow that with, "Are we going out for lunch?"

Diana Faust, then development director at Franciscan Outreach, shared, “Brother Leon served as the bookkeeper of Franciscan Outreach from 1991 to 2008. His conscientious and detailed oriented work of maintaining the financial records helped the organization provide countless meals and shelter nights to homeless men and women of Chicago during the years that he was there. Brother Leon is remembered for his friendly and calm nature, attention to detail, and the computerization of the bookkeeping department. Brother Leon recognized the importance of the emerging technology of the desktop computer and converted the accounting system accordingly. He is fondly remembered for his friendly lunchtime conversations with his co-workers, which conveyed encouragement and kindness that helped them with the sometimes difficult work of serving the homeless.”

The friars at St. Gratian especially appreciated Leon’s marvelous electrical work on the second floor of the new addition to the house that was not finished when the Province bought the house in 1993. Both the friars and Brother Leon dearly enjoyed his sister and brother, Maryanna and Del, attending our friary’s Mardi Gras party the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Also the friars noted that Brother Leon was very faithful in praying morning and evening prayer with the friars. Before we started praying, we would ask who wants to be the Leader, or Reader, or the Cantor. Usually before anyone could respond, Leon would speak up with a word that he invented. “I will be the psalmologist.” Chuck Faso would smile when he said that wonderful word that he made up to indicate that he wanted to recite the antiphons before each psalm and begin each of the psalms and canticles by reciting the first line. His newly invented word continues to be used with great joy by the friars of St. Gratian.

Father Dennis choose as the first reading, Isaiah 41: 8 – 10, 13. That reading is one of the “Suffering Servant Songs.” Leon had issues with diabetes, heart health, and hearing problems. He never dwelt on them or complained about them. He faithfully went to work as best as he could. He seemed to be living out the prophetic words of God found in Isaiah, “Fear not. I am with you, be not dismayed, I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you.”

The second reading was Paul’s letter to the Corinthians 5: 14 – 17. Once Leon made his final profession as a Franciscan Friar, he went whole heartedly into living his friar life. Brother Leon seemed to take to heart the words of St. Paul, “The love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all. Whoever is in Christ is a new creation.” Leon was an avid reader. He watched EWTN. He would pray the rosary once or twice a day as they prayed it on TV, as well as praying as they celebrated the Eucharist on TV. His deep and abiding faith drew him to a closer relationship with the Lord. He listened to TV using ear phones in his room, so as not to disturb others in the house.

Leon was always inquisitive about what he read in scriptures and about the teachings of the Catholic Faith. He would often ask questions after the community prayed divine office. Some questions were, “Why do the psalms talk about all these ‘gods’?” Or, “What proof do we have of life after death?” Leon seemed to hit at some very core and fundamental questions of faith. At times, we friars would think, “How can we answer his impossible, heavy, deep questions?” Brother Leon was always good and challenging for our friar community.

The Gospel proclaimed at Mass was Matthew 19: 23 – 29. The disciples of Jesus ask, “What will there be for us, who have given up everything and followed you? Jesus replied, Amen I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life.”

We truly believe that Jesus answered Brother Leon's quest and journey with the same answer given to His disciples, inheriting eternal life. Leon, at age 30, gave up life in the secular world and entered St. Paschal's Franciscan Brothers School in Oak Brook, Illinois. Leon learned the work of an electrician. He began his new journey into religious life, beginning to learn to live the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He then lived as a Franciscan Friar for 49 years.

Leon loved to go out to restaurants to eat. He enjoyed having people around him when he ate. We pray that he is now surrounded by all the heavenly hosts as he is enjoying the greatest of all meals, the Eucharistic feast in heaven. Today we especially remember the joy that Leon lived. Leon dearly loved and enjoyed his blood family, his Franciscan family and the Eucharist. May we each take Leon's, "Uncle Ray's," example of faith into our own lives. We today celebrate his life in heaven, the reward of his faith life, his eternal joy with Jesus in heaven. That promise of eternal life in heaven is available for each and every one who has faith in Christ Jesus, the Son of God.

At the end of Mass the friars present sang "The Ultima" praying in song that the Virgin Mary take Leon to the arms of her son, Jesus, in heaven. Everyone was invited to a noon dinner in the dining room at Mayslake Village. More delightful stories and memories of Brother Leon, "Uncle Ray," were shared amid laughter and love.

In your kindness, please consider making a donation in memory of Brother Leon Beranek, O.F.M. to the Development Office of the Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart.

Please send your charitable contribution to:

St. Anthony Friary
3140 Meramec Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63118-4399