

Obituary of Friar Sylvano Pera, O.F.M. 1926 - 2018

Our brother, Sylvano, was born Joseph Pera on February 10, 1926, in Memphis, Tennessee, to Louis and Ida (Pisani) Pera. He shared family life with a sister, Teresa, and two brothers, Louis, Jr. and Robert (our former friar, Callistus). After his grade school education in Memphis, Joseph went to St. Joseph Seminary in Westmont, Illinois, for his first 6 years of education and Franciscan formation. As WWII was coming to an end, Teutopolis, Illinois, would be his next step along the way of Franciscan life, as on July 4, 1945, Provincial Wenceslaus Krzycki, O.F.M., received him into the Franciscan novitiate and gave him the name, Sylvano. First vows were professed on July 5, 1946, and Sylvano and his class moved to West Park, Ohio, to complete their college studies. Back in Teutopolis for his theological studies after his 3 years in West Park, Provincial Eligius Weir, O.F.M., received his solemn profession on July 5, 1949. Sylvano was ordained by Bishop William A. O'Connor, the bishop of the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois, on June 24, 1952.

His Sacred Eloquence course was held at St. Francis Parish in Quincy, Illinois, in 1953-54 and then holy obedience bade Sylvano go to Rome, Italy, from 1954-57 to study and earn his S.T.D. in Church History at the Pontifical University Antonianum. His thesis, entitled *“Historical Notes Concerning 10 of the 31 Propositions Condemned by Alexander VII (1690),”* was published in volume 20 of Franciscan Studies in 1960. From 1957 to 1968, he was a Lector of Theology at the major seminary in Teutopolis, serving also as Vicar from 1962-1966 and Master of Clerics from 1963-1966. In the summer of 1968, Sylvano moved to St. Paschal's in Oak Brook, teaching for a year at CTU (1968-1969) and then 6 years (1969-1975) as Novice Master and Guardian at St. Paschal's in Oakbrook, Illinois.

We perhaps catch a glimpse of what Sylvano brought to his own years of teaching and formation work when, reading in the Teutopolis Press in July, 1969, we hear part of his sermon celebrating the life of his mentor, Fr. Germain Schwab, O.F.M.: *“Today I honor the man who has taught me ‘to lead a life worthy of my vocation’ (Eph 4:1). Today I honor the man who has helped me to a ‘deep knowledge of the Son of God’ (Eph 4:13-14), who has led me on the way to ‘perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ.’ Today I honor the man who has so often announced to me, especially during my days as a cleric and a young priest, ‘the good tidings of the unfathomable riches of Christ’ (Eph. 3:8). Today I honor the man who has helped me to be aware of ‘Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge.’” (Eph. 3:18)*

1975 saw his energies for teaching and formation shift almost completely to pastoral work in the Church, probably again guided by words in that sermon for Germain: *“Fr. Germain helped me to understand to a greater degree what it means to be a priest. In him I found something of Christ. The priest must always be a man of God. He must be with his people representing Christ to them. He must be understanding, compassionate, sympathetic, and warm. He must be merciful, forgiving, and patient. He must be self-sacrificing, generous, self-controlled, and self-disciplined. The priest must possess much of what is human, but perhaps more of what is divine.”*

The next 25 years saw Sylvano ministering in a number of parishes and clusters. How many people were touched by his gentle and loving regard for them as he celebrated the Eucharist, presided at funerals and wedding and baptisms, or offered pastoral advice? In 2012, for his 60th Jubilee of priesthood, an article appeared in the **Catholic Times** of the Diocese of Springfield that captures, to a large extent, his many years of priestly Franciscan ministry. Written by reporter, Cathy Locher, we read: *“Fr. Sylvano served as pastor at St. Rose of Lima, Montrose, St. Anthony, St. Louis, Missouri, and Sacred Heart, Indianapolis, Indiana. He was associate pastor at St. Jude, New Lenox, and pastor at Holy Trinity, Dubuque, Iowa; again, at St. Rose of Lima, Montrose, St. Aloysius, Bishop Creek, Immaculate Conception, Dieterich, and St. Joseph, Island Grove. He was chaplain at St. Francis Village, Crowley, Texas; pastor at St. Elizabeth, Marine, Illinois, St. Gertrude, Grant Fork, and St. James, St. Jacob; co-pastor at St. Norbert, Hardin; St. Michael, Michael; St. Anselm, Kampsville; and St. Agnes, Belleview; parochial vicar at Our Lady of Lourdes, Decatur; pastor at St. Mary, McGehee, Arkansas; parochial administrator at St. Mary, Help of Christians, Green Creek; and Sacred Heart, Lillyville; and lastly, sacramental minister for the Effingham deanery.”* In his own words in that article, Sylvano said that what he tried to be as a Franciscan priest *“has always been to bring Jesus to the people ... young people, old people, the sick and others. To always tell them how merciful, loving and compassionate God is, and to help them in their struggles in life to stay close to Jesus.”* On a humorous note, in an earlier article in the **Catholic Times** for his 50th Jubilee, Sylvano had commented: *“I’m Italian, but I’ve been mainly in German parishes. So I tell the people: ‘You know what sauerkraut is? Spaghetti that never made it.’”*

Beginning in 2005, Sylvano entered into a semi-retired state, offering supply ministry for several years in Springfield, Illinois, and then, again, back in Teutopolis from 2007-2013. From 2013 on, he retired and lived as a member of the Franciscan community at St. Clare’s in Alton, Illinois. When his health demanded more care, he moved for the last year to Dutchtown South Care Center, near St. Anthony Friary, in St. Louis, Missouri. Sylvano died at St. Louis University Hospital on Tuesday, February 6, 2018, just four days short of his 92nd birthday.

Our Secretary of the Province, Jim Lause, O.F.M., fills in the details of the funeral: *“Over 20 friars, several diocesan priests, other religious, many former parishioners from parishes throughout Southern Illinois and St. Louis, former students and novices, friends and family, gathered on Monday, February 12th, at St. Anthony of Padua Church in St. Louis, Missouri, for his funeral. Provincial Minister, Tom Nairn, O.F.M., presided at the Mass of Christian Burial, and Provincial Vicar, John Eaton, O.F.M., preached. John spoke of how throughout his life as a friar, Sylvano had been “yoked” to Jesus whom he followed faithfully in all of his ministry assignments...and he did so with great humility, simplicity and joy. After a luncheon in the parish hall, burial followed in the friars’ plot at Ss. Peter and Paul Cemetery in St. Louis.”*

In your kindness, please consider making a donation in memory of Fr. Sylvano Pera, 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 St., St. Louis, MO. 63118-4399.