

A HEALING PRIEST FOR OTHERS— VENERABLE SOLANUS CASEY OF DETROIT

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Fifty years ago this past summer Fr. Solanus Casey (Bernard Francis Casey) died in Detroit, Michigan. Although thousands of mourners turned out for his wake and funeral, he was not particularly well-known elsewhere, other than in Detroit, parts of New York, and Huntington, Indiana. Fr. Solanus was in fact a past master of invisibility in avoiding worldly recognition during his clerical lifetime. His name and picture can be found in few news accounts prior to 1957.¹

Nevertheless, as a humble priest, Fr. Solanus lived an exemplary life by following the call of the Gospels during each new day. His wonderful listening, counseling, faith, and prayers brought both physical and spiritual healing to thousands of people. He was not only a friend to the people and a good counselor, but he also provided a great healing presence.

Much has been written about Fr. Solanus Casey since 1957, including at least five biographies. These interweaving biographies are the main resource for Fr. Solanus's life and they are relied upon extensively to outline his life herein.²

As a true son of Ireland, Fr. Solanus brought mirth and a deep youthful faith to his life and vocation. Faced with dark

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¹ The archives at the Solanus Casey Center in Detroit, Michigan have a collection of articles about Solanus Casey contained in a series of albums. There are no more than seven articles that predate 1957 in them.

² See SOLANUS CASEY: THE OFFICIAL ACCOUNT OF A VIRTUOUS AMERICAN LIFE (Michael Crosby ed., 2000) [hereinafter OFFICIAL ACCOUNT]; MICHAEL H. CROSBY, THANK GOD AHEAD OF TIME: THE LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY OF SOLANUS CASEY (1985) [hereinafter CROSBY, THANK GOD]; JAMES PATRICK DERUM, THE PORTER OF SAINT BONAVENTURE'S: THE LIFE OF FATHER SOLANUS CASEY, CAPUCHIN (1968); CATHERINE M. ODELL, SOLANUS CASEY: THE STORY OF FATHER SOLANUS (rev. ed. 2007); BROTHER LEO WOLLENWEBER, MEET SOLANUS CASEY: SPIRITUAL COUNSELOR AND WONDER WORKER (2002).

times in difficult places, Fr. Solanus dealt with them directly, by infusing light, faith, and confidence into each dark time and difficult place.

I. THE IRISH FAMILY

Fr. Solanus's parents were born in County Monahan (Bernard, Sr.) and County Antrim (Ellen). Ellen arrived in the United States first in 1852 and Bernard arrived in 1857. Both parents lost their fathers before they left Ireland. James, who was Bernard's father, was killed in 1842 on Orangeman's day, while fighting to protect his Catholic Church from attack by Orange marchers.³ The death was caused by a blow from a blackthorn. Ellen's father, Michael Murphy, died as a victim of the great hunger in 1849.⁴

After coming to the United States, Fr. Solanus's parents first met each other during a July 4th picnic in 1860.⁵ After a long-distance courtship that was subsequently forced on them by Ellen's mother, the couple wed, and then eventually moved to Wisconsin to start farming in 1865.⁶ Living on three increasingly larger farms throughout the years, his parents had sixteen children, fourteen of who survived into adulthood and three of who became priests.

Fr. Solanus was born in 1870 and was the sixth Casey child. His christened name was Bernard ("Bernie"), after his father.⁷ By growing up in the countryside of Wisconsin, Bernie had a unique rural background with which to later address the more urban communities and the people he would minister to. His strong faith and trust in God exemplified the trust of a farmer, one who relied every day on God's will for temporal survival as well as for eternal salvation.⁸ It can be argued that growing up in a rural setting allowed Bernie to develop a much clearer perspective and understanding of the cycle of life and death.

³ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 14; OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 14; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 20.

⁴ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 14; OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 13; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 11.

⁵ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 15; CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 1.

⁶ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 29–30; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 23.

⁷ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 25.

⁸ More than most other persons, farmers seem to have a faith that is very closely tied to their overall existence.

His Irish parents made sure he understood the importance of God and strong values. Prayer time in the Casey household was throughout the day, but it was definitely scheduled every evening at 7:00 p.m., as a regular family get-together to say the rosary.⁹ After the prayers were said, Bernard Sr. might read a story,¹⁰ break out the fiddle with Irish music, or initiate conversation, folk stories, or lively debate that would warm the evening and the room.¹¹ The Casey family members were very well-read for an immigrant family in the late 1800s, with Cooper's *Deerslayer* and Dickens being some of their favorite readings.¹² They also appear to have been a closely knit Irish family who exhibited an enduring love toward one another throughout the years.¹³

In 1888, Bernie went to work elsewhere in order to support the family.¹⁴ He worked on a streetcar, after having worked as a lumberjack, a foundry man, and a prison guard.¹⁵ Upon seeing a terrible killing while driving his streetcar,¹⁶ Bernie came to experience a strong pull towards a vocation in the priesthood.

II. SOLANUS CASEY'S DECISION TO PURSUE A VOCATION AS A PRIEST

From 1892 to 1896, Bernie attended a diocesan seminary in Milwaukee, but was found wanting because of his academic work. His failing, however, could have been the fate of any of us alive today, had we attempted his arduous studies. He was required to learn Latin and all his other subjects through German, instead of English. This was required even though he was not German and spoke no German previously.¹⁷ The students entering many Midwestern seminaries at the time were required to learn to write German fluently, even though it was

⁹ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 20; OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 19. Saying the rosary together in May and October has been a tradition in many Catholic families, including my own.

¹⁰ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 35.

¹¹ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 25–26.

¹² See *id.* at 26; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 35; CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 11.

¹³ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 18.

¹⁴ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 25.

¹⁵ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 41–46.

¹⁶ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 26; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 48.

¹⁷ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 36.

not their native language—English was not regarded as a main language in these seminaries.¹⁸

Bernie was definitely taken aback by his apparent failure in the diocesan seminary¹⁹ and spent some time with his parents that summer working on the farm and deciding what he would do next. To gain an additional understanding of his next step, he began a Novena to Our Lady at the beginning of Advent on the feast of St. Andrew (November 30, 1896).²⁰ On December 8th, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the answer came to him as he concluded the Novena. It was to go to Detroit and enter the Capuchin Order.²¹ Bernie immediately made plans to do so, thereafter leaving by train for Chicago and eventually Detroit. He arrived in Detroit on Christmas Eve at the Capuchins' St. Bonaventure Monastery on Mt. Elliott Street. Bernie found himself completely exhausted and went to bed. He later awoke to the sounds of "*Stille Nacht*" and other Christmas carols, as midnight mass began for the Capuchins.²² Although he would soon thereafter have other doubts about his vocation and encounter many obstacles in fulfilling his vocation, Bernie found peace on that Christmas Eve of 1896.²³ It remained with him throughout his life.

Later on in his religious studies, Bernie again ran into difficulties with academics and with his "language" problem. His German-speaking Capuchin superiors approached him and made him sign a waiver in which he acknowledged his failings and also offered a self-recognition that he might not be chosen to become a priest.²⁴ Even after this humiliation, he still labored on with his best efforts. Eventually he made it through the seminary courses and was ordained on July 24, 1904 (twelve years after he had initially started in the earlier seminary in Milwaukee).²⁵

¹⁸ See *id.*

¹⁹ See *id.* at 39.

²⁰ Ironically, at that same time a new prayer received the imprimatur of New York's Cardinal, Michael Augustine Corrigan. It was called the "St. Andrew Prayer" and was to be said fifteen times a day from November 30th to December 24th. This multiple novena prayer is still regarded as a very powerful intercession today. See Novena to Saint Andrew, <http://www.catholicdoors.com/prayers/novenas/p00098.htm> (last visited Mar. 14, 2008), for the text of the prayer.

²¹ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 58.

²² See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 28.

²³ See *id.*; DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 67.

²⁴ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 45–46.

²⁵ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 84.

Although there was nothing in Fr. Solanus's certification from Rome limiting his priestly duties,²⁶ the Capuchin friars decided to ordain him only as a "simplex" priest.²⁷ This meant that he could not hear confessions and could not deliver regular sermons during the year. He could only say Mass and perform supporting church duties.

III. THE EARLY VOCATION OF FR. SOLANUS

The first parish Fr. Solanus was assigned to was Sacred Heart Church in Yonkers, New York, in August of 1904. His first duties, in addition to saying Mass, were to oversee the sacristy as the Sacristan and to work with and oversee the altar boys.²⁸ This appeared to be a humbling placement for even a new priest, but Fr. Solanus worked hard to fulfill each of his new duties.

In 1906, Fr. Solanus also became the Porter for Sacred Heart Church.²⁹ This appointment began a long career of answering the church door to speak with people who wanted to speak to a priest. Fr. Solanus was humble and a good listener. He seemed to put people at ease in his company. Most importantly, he avoided judging people.³⁰ Among the Italian parishioners, he became known as the "Holy Priest,"³¹ in part because he took the time to help so many people.

In 1918, he was assigned to Our Lady of Sorrows in lower Manhattan, and in 1921, he was sent to Our Lady Queen of Angels in Harlem.³² At that time, Queen of Angels was a large Irish parish.³³ In addition to his work with the parish, Fr. Solanus became known there as a writer in support of the Irish

²⁶ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 45.

²⁷ See *id.*

²⁸ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 53; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 81, 84.

²⁹ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 55.

³⁰ See *id.* ("He accepted people wherever they were.")

³¹ CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 53; OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 56.

³² See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 49.

³³ Most recently it was a predominantly Spanish-speaking parish, until the church was closed by Cardinal Egan in February of 2007. See Alex Mindlin, *Turning for Help to a Saint in the Making*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 9, 2007, § 14, at 14.

cause.³⁴ He also became a great supporter of missions through the Seraphic Mass Association.³⁵

People were encouraged to give a donation in support of the missions, and the Capuchins in turn would arrange for masses or prayers to be said for one's intentions. Fr. Solanus would also give a blessing to all those who came to him. Thereafter, Fr. Solanus's reputation for healing began to grow at Queen of Angels, and the word went out that if you needed help, Fr. Solanus was the one to see. The number of people visiting him increased, and throughout his life, thousands waited innumerable hours to see him.

On November 28, 1923, the Capuchin Provincial, Fr. Benno Aichinger, sat down and spoke with Fr. Solanus.³⁶ Upon learning of the stories about the help people were receiving, Fr. Benno asked Fr. Solanus to keep a notebook log of the petitions made and of the positive results received.³⁷ Fr. Solanus did this faithfully. Through his life he kept a number of such notebooks, while similar records were made by the secretaries and priests assigned to him in later years.³⁸

IV. WHEN FR. SOLANUS RETURNED TO DETROIT

Fr. Solanus received notice on July 30, 1924 to return to Detroit and to arrive by August 1st. The Detroit city that he returned to was now one of the largest cities in the United States and much larger than the one he had left.³⁹ The auto industry had brought thousands of new residents to Detroit, and the city had grown and was in full bloom in 1924.

Among his duties, Fr. Solanus was appointed as an Assistant Porter to answer the door at St. Bonaventure. He would not be the Head Porter, as he had been at Queen of Angels.⁴⁰ People started coming to the church in increasing numbers and waiting patiently in long lines to see only Fr. Solanus.⁴¹ He in turn

³⁴ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 66–67; CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 89.

³⁵ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 50–51.

³⁶ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 110–111.

³⁷ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 103.

³⁸ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 213–14.

³⁹ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 75.

⁴⁰ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 118.

⁴¹ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 76.

listened to each person until they finished.⁴² He did so from 7:00 a.m., after Mass, frequently until 10:00 p.m. at night.⁴³ And the responses from the people indicated that they, like the parishioners at Queen of Angels, were receiving many blessings, including some apparently incredible cures.

Fr. Solanus was a great gift to Detroit as the 1929 crash and depression came upon it. He worked with the newly expanded soup kitchen at St. Bonaventure to help those who now were doing without. He called upon donors and he even drove out to the countryside⁴⁴ to obtain fruit and vegetables for the soup kitchen. When not working as a Porter, he was also assisting in the soup kitchen. The number of persons coming to the soup kitchen was very large during the 1930s and the St. Bonaventure Monastery worked hard not to be overwhelmed. During the depression “[t]he auto industry was functioning 80% idle, wages dropped by 37% and employment was cut by 50%. The welfare load in the city of Detroit grew from 5,000 cases in 1929 to 50,000 in 1932.”⁴⁵ It was in this difficult milieu in Detroit that Fr. Solanus truly fulfilled his life’s work.

V. FR. SOLANUS’S APPROACH WITH THOSE WHO CAME TO SEE HIM

From many different sources and in many different places, reports of healings and positive resolutions were related to a visit to Fr. Solanus. Fr. Michael Crosby⁴⁶ has identified a three-part basis for why Fr. Solanus believed these healings and positive resolutions occurred.⁴⁷ The people who came to see Fr. Solanus agreed to do three things: “(1) believe, (2) pray with faith, and (3) make a promise.”⁴⁸ Fr. Solanus took the Lord at his word—

⁴² *See id.*

⁴³ *See id.* at 77.

⁴⁴ *See id.* at 93.

⁴⁵ GENEVIEVE M. CASEY, FATHER CLEM KERN, CONSCIENCE OF DETROIT 80 (1989).

⁴⁶ Fr. Michael Crosby has written a book about Fr. Solanus (THANK GOD) and edited another book about him (OFFICIAL ACCOUNT). Fr. Crosby had also been “appointed to be the collaborator to the relator for the Cause [of the beatification of Solanus Casey] in the summer of 1987.” OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 8. More information on the Cause for Venerable Solanus Casey may be obtained from Br. Leo Wollenweber, OFM Cap., Vice Postulator, 1780 Mt. Elliott St., Detroit, Michigan 48207, (313) 579-2100, ext. 139.

⁴⁷ *See* OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 122.

⁴⁸ *Id.*; *see also* Matthew 17:20 (New American).

that if you prayed with faith, then even mountains could be moved. “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”⁴⁹ Confidence in God was the bedrock of Fr. Solanus’s theology.⁵⁰ So, it was important that the person making the petition believed healing could occur through God, and had faith that it would. The rationale for making the promise was to also have the person do something to show gratitude to God “ahead of time.”⁵¹ The promise could be contributing to the Seraphic Mass Association and thereby the missions, or agreeing to help someone who needed help, or possibly reading a spiritual tract that Fr. Solanus asked the person to look at and reflect upon.⁵² He also asked many to look deeper into their own faith.⁵³ The promise made by the petitioner when asking God for assistance reflected Fr. Solanus’s underlying belief that religion is “the science of our happy relationship with God and our neighbors.”⁵⁴

It apparently was not uncommon for Fr. Solanus to meet with someone, listen to them, and pray with them in faith. He would then ask the petitioner to do something as a promise and/or enroll them in the Seraphic Mass Association.⁵⁵ After that, Fr. Solanus might tell the person not to worry with “specific and detailed instructions.”⁵⁶ Often, if the person did what they had agreed to do, they would be healed fairly quickly, or the problem would be solved fairly quickly.

In line with God’s will, however, not everybody would be healed or every problem solved. If Fr. Solanus intuited that a person would not be healed (and he appeared to be extremely prescient in knowing), he might ask him or her to continue praying and he would do so as well.⁵⁷ Or, he may simply have told the person, in a very kind and very loving way, that healing would not come to them.⁵⁸ This kindness seemed to help the person prepare for what was to come.

⁴⁹ *Matthew 7:7*; see also CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 183.

⁵⁰ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 183.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² See *id.* at 184.

⁵³ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 165.

⁵⁴ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 187 (capitalization removed).

⁵⁵ See *id.* at 105.

⁵⁶ OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 85.

⁵⁷ See *id.*; ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 133.

⁵⁸ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 133.

When people were healed, or their problems were addressed, many returned to personally thank Fr. Solanus for what he had done for them. But he, on occasion, would simply point to the sky and look up, observing that whatever benefits occurred were derived from God's will, not at all from his own doing.⁵⁹

VI. SOME OF THE HEALINGS IN THE MINISTRY OF FATHER SOLANUS

The discussion above talks about healings as though they definitely occurred. In fact, it seems irrefutable that many healings, if not thousands, occurred for people who believed and were blessed by Fr. Solanus.⁶⁰ The irony is that they occurred in an almost matter of fact or ordinary way that was part of the flow of life and death. However, just how many occurred may never be fully known. Fr. Solanus did not regard what he was doing as some extraordinary undertaking. As a Porter, he apparently saw it as part of his life's work, recognizing that each of us have our call in life to fulfill, and must do so in accord with God's will. His call was as a simplex priest who carefully listened to people and did his best to help them. He did this through counseling, prayer, and the special gifts allowed him—the greatest of which seemed to be an encompassing humility that brought peace, resolution, and healing to so many people. It was said that even babies stopped crying when he walked into a room.

Examples of the healings Fr. Solanus was involved with are numerous and can be found throughout the five biographies written on his life.⁶¹ The healings ranged the gamut from having persons turn back to God,⁶² healing people from alcoholism,⁶³ and healing people of seemingly incurable diseases.⁶⁴ In addition, he did not limit his healings to Catholics and in fact took an ecumenical approach to those of other faiths long before Vatican

⁵⁹ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 117–18; OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 82. Mr. Frederick Lauck, a renowned attorney in Detroit, stated that after his relatives had been to see Fr. Solanus and thanked him for his assistance, he pointed his finger towards the sky and looked up saying: "It's his doing." Telephone Interview with Frederick Lauck (Oct. 12, 2007) (on file with author).

⁶⁰ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 137–51.

⁶¹ See sources cited *supra* note 2.

⁶² See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 107–08, 119.

⁶³ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 111–12.

⁶⁴ See *id.* at 126–27.

II.⁶⁵ As previously mentioned, he kept notebooks on the petitions and positive results.

Some of the healings are recounted below and are taken from Fr. Solanus's biographies. Even now, on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, healings and intercessions are still being remembered by many families who were touched by him. Present-day petitioners and the answers to their prayers are also being noted.⁶⁶ It is amazing that Fr. Solanus did so much, so quietly, for so many years.

One of the healings occurred in Detroit in the 1930s, and was witnessed by Fr. Marion Roessler, one of the Capuchins.⁶⁷ A small girl who was crippled and could not walk was brought to Fr. Solanus at St. Bonaventure. He enrolled her in the Seraphic Mass Association and gave her a blessing. She was sitting with a relative and Fr. Solanus was sitting across the room. He asked her to come to him. She walked over to him and from then on continued to be able to walk.

Another case was Charles Rogers. He was a young man beginning to suffer from polio, which was causing him to grow stiff in his neck and limbs.⁶⁸ A specialist examined Charles without a great deal of hope. He wanted Charles to go to the hospital right away. Instead, Fr. Solanus was asked by his parents to enroll Charles in the Seraphic Mass Association. By the next morning, Charles was walking around. The doctor who had examined Charles returned to the household, and after seeing Charles, pronounced the recovery to be a "miracle."⁶⁹

Mrs. Coppillei went to see Fr. Solanus in 1932 with her son Raymond who was only eight months old.⁷⁰ He had been in Harper Hospital and had a temperature of 108 degrees. He was going to be operated on the next day for mastoiditis, by having the bone near his ear drilled through. Mrs. Coppillei instead took Raymond from the hospital the evening before to see Fr. Solanus. He enrolled Raymond in the Seraphic Mass

⁶⁵ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 165.

⁶⁶ Archdiocese of Detroit, *The Legacy of Ven. Solanus Casey Lives On*, MICH. CATH., July 27, 2007, <http://www.aodonline.org/AODOnline/News+++Publications+2203/Michigan+Catholic+News+12203/2007+The+Michigan+Catholic+News+14936/070727+MCN+-+The+legacy.htm>.

⁶⁷ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 142.

⁶⁸ See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 120.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 121–22.

⁷⁰ See *id.* at 115–17.

Association, prayed over him, and gave him a blessing. He then told Mrs. Coppillei to take Raymond home, and that he would be better the next day. Raymond was better the next day.

Fr. Solanus did not hold himself out to be an alternative to modern medicine.⁷¹ In fact, he worked with doctors on occasion and told many people to go through with various medical procedures for healing. Nevertheless, some of what Fr. Solanus did when he was alive was regarded as miraculous by both doctors⁷² and hospitals.⁷³

VII. FR. SOLANUS CASEY'S CONCERN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Fr. Solanus also had a keen awareness of justice and fairness. His awareness may have initially arisen from his two lost grandfathers and the tragedy their deaths presented to the family. Or, he may have seen injustice through the lives of many of the people he encountered everyday, especially in the 1930s. In any event, Fr. Solanus had at least two major justice concerns in his life. The first was the Irish cause that he wrote passionately about. The second was his concern for the poor and their plight. He saw the plight of the poor as everyone's concern.

In addition, Fr. Solanus had a strong concern about fairness to the religious. He saw great unfairness occurring to a group of Anglican nuns at Graymoor, New York, after their decision to convert to Catholicism.⁷⁴ He also viewed the house arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty in the 1950s as very unjust⁷⁵ and saw communism and atheism as creating and promoting injustice.⁷⁶

A. *The Irish Cause*

The feelings Fr. Solanus had about the English may resonate throughout a room full of Irish Americans. In some ways such feelings cannot be put into words and sometimes may not be easily understood by other Americans. These feelings are more like a pit in the stomach at what can only be viewed as a dark history of oppression and injustice. In 1916 and 1921 to 1923 the

⁷¹ See *id.* at 123; CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 127.

⁷² See DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 113.

⁷³ See ODELL, *supra* note 2, at 141.

⁷⁴ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 226; CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 64–65.

⁷⁵ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 228.

⁷⁶ See *id.* at 161, 228.

issues were raw and apparent. American newspapers and even American presidents, such as President Woodrow Wilson, appeared to have a significant political leaning that was anglophile in nature. Fr. Solanus saw this as an unjust bias against the Irish and decided to take it on. He challenged both newspapers and Bishops who failed to support the Irish cause.⁷⁷ Fr. Solanus wrote frequently to various editors⁷⁸ and openly addressed the Bishops of Buffalo and Baltimore, who he believed were opposed to the Irish cause:

But I would ask his Lordship from Buffalo and his Grace from Baltimore . . . who is to blame, if not the despicable power his own Grace and his Lordship seem to be now espousing and that De Valera has frustrated, escaped and withstood these four years—so long so bitter for poor Ireland⁷⁹

Fr. Solanus later had some concerns about being so outspoken in his support for the Irish cause, including his speaking to various rallies of Irish societies. One group he was asked to speak to was the convention for the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic.⁸⁰ Because of his concern about addressing this convention, he took it up with Cardinal Hayes in New York by asking if he was “doing right.”⁸¹ Cardinal Hayes’s reply was an interestingly nuanced one that seemed to be supportive. The Cardinal stated: “It’s all right, Father. Encourage the people and console them in every way you can.”⁸²

I wonder if Fr. Solanus were alive today and as politically active as he was in the 1920s, would he be precluded from advocating and pursuing such political aims and goals? I wonder if he would face censure today for similarly addressing the Bishop of Buffalo or the Bishop of Baltimore on anti-immigrant political positions?

Is it possible to draw parallels between Fr. Solanus’s cause and advocacy for the Irish in the 1920s and the cause and advocacy of other religious who are opposing oppression in other countries? Social justice for those who are oppressed may in fact

⁷⁷ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 87–89.

⁷⁸ See OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 67.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at 68. Eamon de Valera was the first Taoiseach, or Prime Minister, of Ireland.

⁸⁰ See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 54.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

be a very universal (i.e., Catholic) concept. Or as Fr. Solanus put it more poignantly: “Have you ever fathomed the fact that every crime against justice is at once an outrage on truth and an act of idolatry?”⁸³—strong words from a priest who was known for his lifelong humility, clerical submission, and defense of traditional Catholic positions.

B. The Cause of the Poor

Both of Fr. Solanus’s Irish parents apparently encouraged him to be concerned about the plight of the poor.⁸⁴ An early entry found in one of Fr. Solanus’s seminary notebooks highlights a quote from Pope Clement XIV, when he was still a Cardinal:

Be not contented with giving, but also lend to him that is in need, according to the precept of the Scriptures. I do not know a more contemptible object than money if it be not employed to assist our neighbor. Can the insipid pleasure of heaping up crowns be compared with the satisfaction of conferring happiness and the felicity of attaining heaven?⁸⁵

When Fr. Solanus was first a priest, he studied the social teachings of Pope Leo XIII and the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Fr. Solanus quoted Pope Leo as saying: “Our lot has been cast in an age that is bitterly opposed to justice and truth,”⁸⁶ and again, “The social problem is not a question of charity or of donations but a question of right and of fundamental Christian justice.”⁸⁷

This appears to reflect the theological grounding for Fr. Solanus in his need to help those less well off. He also castigated covetousness as the root of evil,⁸⁸ and excoriated materialism and consumerism.⁸⁹ He was also known to have addressed the poor and homeless at times as the “Knight[s] of the Road.”⁹⁰ This respectful appellation was similar to one used by Fr. Clement Kern in Detroit at about the same time.⁹¹

⁸³ OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 67.

⁸⁴ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 291.

⁸⁵ OFFICIAL ACCOUNT, *supra* note 2, at 47–48.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 226.

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ See *id.* at 186.

⁸⁹ See CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 241–42.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 193.

⁹¹ See CASEY, *supra* note 45, at 26. Fr. Kern referred to the homeless as “Knights of the Avenue.”

Fr. Solanus saw each of our lives as a dependence on God and one another,⁹² and he believed that, “[i]f a man lives as he should, he will be given the knowledge to aid people. And if we are interested in saving our own souls we must have an interest in our [sisters and] brothers.”⁹³ He also recognized, “[w]hat a privilege [it was] to do a favor for God in doing [so] for our neighbor.”⁹⁴ Fr. Solanus stated, “[i]n responding to others in their needs, as God has responded to us in our needs, we reveal ourselves as images of God. In the process, we not only reveal God’s care or *pathos*, but experience ourselves cared for by God.”⁹⁵

These pre-1957 statements by Fr. Solanus were precursors to Vatican II and especially *Gaudium et Spes*.⁹⁶ The Pastoral Constitution in 1965 recognized a special obligation for each of us to be a true neighbor by actively helping others who are in need when they cross our path, without exception.⁹⁷ It also pronounced that we must share with all of our neighbors, while at the same time recognizing that we are interdependent on one another.⁹⁸

Fr. Solanus recognized that “[f]aith alone is dead”⁹⁹ and he encouraged people to supplement their faith with good works.¹⁰⁰ The idea of a personal God that excludes others was contrary to Fr. Solanus’s view of God’s love. Fr. Crosby has pointed out that Fr. Solanus believed that “any spirituality controlled by individualism was incomplete.”¹⁰¹ More so than most, Fr. Solanus lived his belief. He took up the cross to follow Christ in aiding others.¹⁰² *Deo Gratias!*

Now, what are we doing?¹⁰³

⁹² See WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 13.

⁹³ DERUM, *supra* note 2, at 251; see also WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 73.

⁹⁴ WOLLENWEBER, *supra* note 2, at 93 (ch. 10 epigraph) (third alteration in original).

⁹⁵ CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 290.

⁹⁶ See PAUL VI, PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD *GAUDIUM ET SPES* (Dec. 7, 1965).

⁹⁷ *Id.* ¶ 27.

⁹⁸ *Id.* ¶¶ 23–24.

⁹⁹ CROSBY, THANK GOD, *supra* note 2, at 145 (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹⁰⁰ See *id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 290.

¹⁰² See *id.* at 276.

¹⁰³ See *id.* at 290; see also *Matthew* 25:35–25:46 (New American).

VII. HOW MAY THE LIFE AND WORK OF FATHER SOLANUS CASEY
BE RELEVANT TO LAWYERS, LAW STUDENTS, AND THE LAW?

As law students and lawyers, including those of us looking at Fr. Solanus from a Catholic perspective, is it important to understand how Fr. Solanus lived his life in service to others? Is his example something that lawyers can recognize, much less emulate? Or, is the suggestion of following his example just some pie-in-the-sky idealism that might be good for a cleric, but is wholly foreign to the legal professional? After all, law students and lawyers learn and work in the real world, a world of over-the-top competition. Lawyers are frequently part of business and commerce advocating for differing positions on difficult disputes. The approach that is taken in these commercial disputes, as well as many social disputes, is often referred to as “scorched earth!” The purpose is all too frequently to take no prisoners and to win at all costs, with monetary gain the important rationale. So, where do concepts of humility, compassion, love, or even simply listening, play a role in such a world of such hard-edged advocacy?

In part, a response to such questions may be found in the world Fr. Solanus Casey lived in. He grew up farming in the nineteenth century in a situation of annual survival concerns for both he and his family. In fact, he lost two of his siblings on the farm. As a priest, he lived and worked with immigrants who were without means and later a city and nation without means during the depression. The world he lived in was a very real and often harsh. It was definitely a much harsher reality than most any of us face today, especially lawyers.

Two areas of Fr. Solanus’s life may play important roles in the life and vocation of others, including lawyers. The first is constant prayer in whatever vocation a person is pursuing. It offers a recognition that we do not “control” everything and that we rely upon outside assistance to do well and live well together. The second is recognition of the need to provide service to others, not just for their benefit, but for ours as well. It is not the concept of occasional alms or “committee work” that is sufficient, but rather a real investment of ourselves in the plight of others who are less fortunate.

A. Prayer in Everyday Life

The idea of praying, much less praying constantly in daily life, may seem foreign to many people, especially to a number of lawyers. After all, normal daily life is filled with important activities and business. How can one afford to waste his/her time on the distraction of prayer? Can't that be done on Sundays or Saturdays if at all? Who is out there listening? Even if someone is listening, why should we pray, even intermittently? What does prayer have to do with the law and its practice?

A quick response to these questions cannot be found in this short Essay. However, an example of the importance of prayer can be found in Fr. Solanus's own vocation of service. His vocation involved being in the world every day, while dealing with people and their host of problems. He listened to people, advised them, and sought to help them resolve difficulties that were overwhelming. In this "distracting" milieu of a vocation, Fr. Solanus found himself praying constantly. He did so not for himself, but for those who came to see him. He offered his "clients" an important gift—he listened to them carefully before attempting to assist them.

Is this really so different from the vocation of a lawyer, especially a public interest lawyer? Is it so different from the vocation of a sole practitioner? In the end, are there not many parallels between the role of a lawyer and the role of Fr. Solanus, who assisted so many people? While the problems that he addressed may well be very different, and the work of lawyers very different, is there not a real need for prayer to successfully fulfill each of these vocations of service?

The prayer that I am referring to is in many ways simply a reflection of how one pursues his/her daily life. One may offer a petition simply through the actions they take each day. "Everyday life must train us to kindness, patience, peacefulness and understanding; to meekness and gentleness; to forbearance and endurance. In this way, everyday life becomes in itself *prayer*."¹⁰⁴

Each of the daily characteristics suggested above, however, may seem foreign to the daily work of a lawyer.¹⁰⁵ After all,

¹⁰⁴ KARL RAHNER, S.J., ON PRAYER 54 (1958).

¹⁰⁵ For an interesting collection of discussions and thinking by attorneys in daily life, see LAWRENCE JOSEPH, LAWYERLAND (1997).

meeekness, peacefulness, kindness, patience, and understanding seem clearly at odds with the “scorched earth” approach or simply the policy of an attack mode. Yet, some lawyers today see these characteristics as more and more a part of the daily practice of law.¹⁰⁶

A good example of an overall daily life of prayer was exemplified in another person, Brother Lawrence.¹⁰⁷ He was a simple cook in a monastery in the seventeenth century, but found himself in prayer throughout his life and work. He referred to this as the practice of the presence of God.¹⁰⁸ In his cooking, cleaning, and other activities he offered himself in prayer everyday, throughout the day.¹⁰⁹ Like Fr. Solanus, Brother Lawrence was humble and accepted what work he was called to do as being part of his vocation. It was humility that allowed Fr. Solanus and Brother Lawrence to work with order and with full effort. In doing so, each of them became directed to others.

A prayer attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola may provide a good example of such a strong commitment: “Teach us, Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek rest; to labor and not ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do your will.”¹¹⁰

B. *Assisting Others*

The Ignatian prayer of service speaks to assisting others with the problems they face. Fr. Solanus did so through listening and healing, both spiritually and physically. Lawyers today have the specific skills to do so in representing those facing difficult legal problems. It is estimated that between seventy to eighty percent of Americans cannot afford to receive legal assistance and do not.¹¹¹ Because of this, lawyers are encouraged to do pro

¹⁰⁶ See generally Symposium, *Therapeutic Jurisprudence in Clinical Legal Education and Legal Skills Training*, 17 ST. THOMAS L. REV. 403 (2005) (discussing that more and more in the United States the practice of law involves concepts of negotiation and mediation, rather than litigation).

¹⁰⁷ See generally BROTHER LAWRENCE OF THE RESURRECTION, THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD (Donald Attwater trans., Walker & Co. 1985) (1974).

¹⁰⁸ See *id.* at 42.

¹⁰⁹ See *id.* at 41–42.

¹¹⁰ M. BASIL PENNINGTON, POCKET BOOK OF PRAYERS 122 (1986).

¹¹¹ See Letter from Karen J. Mathis, President, Am. Bar Ass’n, to Hon. Alan B. Mollohan, Chairman, and Hon. Rodney Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member, House

bono (*free*) work on behalf of those who are poor and cannot obtain legal representation.

Although a number of lawyers do perform pro bono work, the gap in representation in the United States judicial system remains extremely vast. Most lawyers find that they do not have time to take from their daily lives to do anything other than earn a living for themselves and their families. The concept of actually assisting someone for free seems anathema to their entire professional outlook.

This, of course, is contrary to the vision of assisting others presented by Fr. Solanus. He worked tirelessly and listened to each person until they finished. It is said that he worked from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. almost everyday. These long hours actually sound like the long hours worked by many lawyers, but the similarity apparently ends there. What lawyers could learn from Fr. Solanus is that assisting others is not some “extra” thing to do. Rather, assisting others is something important, not only for those assisted, but for those assisting as well.¹¹²

Detroit may have experienced the depression of the 1930s even more harshly than other parts of the country. Yet, Detroit was fortunate to not only have Fr. Solanus Casey during those dark days, but also to have Fr. Clement Kern, who began his priesthood in Detroit during that time. Fr. Kern “lived” out his role in assisting the poor. As a pastor in later years, he made sure that the poor had medical and health assistance.¹¹³ He made sure that the poor in his area had legal assistance.¹¹⁴ He even made sure that the poor received a proper burial.¹¹⁵ His rectory and church were open almost around the clock and he managed alms so that he could help mostly everyone who came to him, almost every day.¹¹⁶ He did this through a commitment and hard work that matched the dire circumstances the city of Detroit faced. Even though he was a cleric, he still did not need

Appropriations Comm. (June 7, 2007) (citing LEGAL SERVS. CORP., DOCUMENTING THE JUSTICE GAP IN AMERICA: THE CURRENT UNMET CIVIL LEGAL NEEDS OF LOW-INCOME AMERICANS (2005)), http://www.abanet.org/poladv/letters/legalservices/2007jun07_fy08h_l.pdf.

¹¹² See *Matthew* 25:26–25:41 (New American); see also KEVIN E. MCKENNA, YOU DID IT FOR ME: CARE OF YOUR NEIGHBOR AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE 114–120 (2005).

¹¹³ See CASEY, *supra* note 45, at 53.

¹¹⁴ See *id.* at 58.

¹¹⁵ See *id.* at 36.

¹¹⁶ See *id.* at 33.

to undertake all this extra work, but he did it because the situation called for it.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty referred to this type of commitment as being “tireless” in doing God’s will.¹¹⁷ This help for others is not some marginal do-gooder imperative or politically progressive operation. It is not some farcical undertaking that fails to recognize the failings and drawbacks of the poor and some of their erring choices. Rather, it is what lawyers are called to do, whether they choose to listen to the call or not.

Lawyers are offered a great opportunity to fulfill such a call with expertise and just results. Yes, it will take valuable time to accomplish this added work and it may be a significant inconvenience. In the long run, however, it will allow lawyers to do more and be more than they are now. Even a few pro bono hours a week by individual lawyers will garner significant results “for good”—the common good.

Lawyers should not approach this call to assist others because of some unwanted mandate, such as a mandatory state bar pro bono requirement. Instead, lawyers can simply return the love that they received in reaching their present station in life. (*Deo Gratias!*) Even a small return on the blessings that they have received will be important to so many people who are literally desperate in their legal situations. To do less would be a total failure of the more important bar exam: the human one.

¹¹⁷ See CATHERINE DE HUECK DOHERTY, *POUSTINIA: CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY OF THE EAST FOR WESTERN MAN* 139 (1975). Both Fr. Solanus and Fr. Kern exemplified this tireless commitment.