

“Let Thy priests, O Lord, be clothed with justice; for Thy servant David’s sake, turn not away the face of Thy anointed.” [Ps 131:9]

IN REMEMBRANCE 1904-1972
Father David Alberici, O.F.M. Cap.

A REFLECTION BY AIDAN NEENAN, O.F.M. CAP.

At the Last Supper, on the night before He died, Our Lord instituted the Sacrifice of the Mass and the holy priesthood. All members united in the Mystical Body of Christ have a share in His priesthood. But this sharing in the priesthood through Baptism is limited in both degree and function when compared to the powers of the priesthood conferred through the sacrament of Holy Orders. It is this sacrament that empowers the ordained priest to represent Christ as both priest and victim, and to offer on his own behalf, and on behalf of the people, the perfect act of homage in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The priest is taken from among the People of God in order to be appointed on behalf of the same people. Though all priests exercise the office of father and preacher, the Second Vatican Council reminds us that “they, too, like the faithful, are our Lord’s disciples, and are called by God’s grace to share His Kingdom. They are brothers among brothers with all who have been reborn in the font of Baptism. They are likewise members of the one same Body of Christ which all Christians are called to build up.” (Vat. C. II, Presby. Ord. no 9)

Our Holy Father, Pope Paul, in his message to priests at the conclusion of the Year of Faith, wrote: “The priest is the man of God, the minister of the Lord; he can perform acts which transcend natural powers, because he acts in the Person of Christ; through him there passes a superior power, for at given moments he is, in his humility and his glory, its valid instrument, the channel of the Holy Spirit. Between him and the divine sphere there is a unique relationship, a divine delegation and trust.”

It was to this “divine delegation and trust” that John Alberici dedicated his life. He chose for his model in the footsteps of Christ, St. Francis of Assisi. For this purpose, he entered the novitiate of the Capuchin-Franciscans in the year 1921. After years of preparation and study, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1928, close to the feast of his baptismal patron, John. While cherishing the name David, he loved the name John. In the later years of his priestly life, his Capuchin brethren, both young and old, often addressed him as simply ‘John’ and it pleased him very much.





1942

After ordination, Fr. David served in Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Angels parishes in Manhattan, and Sacred Heart parish in Yonkers. Somewhere between his Manhattan and Yonkers assignments, he spent a brief time as utility priest in the novitiate. This was an interesting event in his life. And one night John regaled us in the kitchen with an account of this career.

As Fr. David tells it, this assignment to the novitiate "was a foul-up, a horrible mistake." It seems that having spent some time in city parishes, John hinted that he would like a country parish. The parish that John had in mind was the Monastery parish in Yonkers, which at the time was sufficiently "country-like" for John. But it seems that the Provincial misread John's signals. Either that, or John was just a little too subtle in his approach. At any rate, his Paternity, the Provincial, had another "country" monastery in mind: the novitiate in Huntington, Indiana.

Now in those days, one novitiate in a lifetime was more than sufficient for any normal friar. And John felt he was just barely normal after his first novitiate. His endurance for a second one was out of the question. To properly understand the background, it must be kept in mind that a novitiate of those days bore absolutely no resemblance to the concept of a novitiate today. However, as John put it, because of the Provincial's lack of understanding of nuances in American English, John received an obedience for the country monastery in Indiana. Parenthetically, it was at this point in John's life that he decided "subtlety" was not exactly his forte.

Being an obedient friar, and frankly, with no other choice in sight, John headed to Indiana. The trip took two days by coach on three different railroads. Though exhausted when he arrived at the novitiate, he immediately headed for the choir, and spent the first hour wheeling and dealing with the Lord for an obedience back to his beloved New York.

After more bargaining sessions in choir, John relates that he paid several visits to the Guardian. He was friendly and sympathetic to John's predicament. Eventually, this Guardian earned the eternal gratitude of John because, he, the Guardian, sent a letter to the Provincial, telling his Paternity that a terrible mistake was made in sending John to the novitiate, and would he please send him back where he came from. Finally, after a few weeks, characterized by fervent prayers, much fasting and assorted penances, John received another obedience assigning him back east. The obedience arrived in the morning, and by early noon he was at the railroad station awaiting the first available train, an evening train. Oh yes, before he left the monastery, John related he made a quick visit to the choir chapel, knelt down and said briefly, "Thank you for now, Lord," and then in hurried confusion, added: "and God bless you."

And that's the story John tells of how he eventually got to Yonkers: from New York by way of Indiana. It was all because of an unfortunate mistake. John summarized his traumatic experience in two words: "never again." His words proved prophetic, for according to his personal record, he spent a total of 32 years at Sacred Heart, his "country parish."

Glancing back, before his arrival at Sacred Heart, Fr. David, like any young priest, was energetic, enthusiastic, and quite popular. I remember, as do many of you priests and brothers here today, the field days we used to have back in the 30's at the high school in Garrison. The big event of the day was the baseball game between the students and the priests. Many of the friars in city parishes joined us on that day, and played or rooted for their team. Whenever Fr. David came to the plate, his popularity among the friars was evident in the round of applause he received. John would reciprocate with a tip of his cap, and the mimicking antics of a professional player tapping the dust off the sole of his shoes, moistening and rubbing his hands, and pointing – in Babe Ruth fashion – to some corner of the field where he was going to hit the ball. And he could hit the ball, and run fast, and steal bases. As an athlete, he was best among equals. Even in his later years, he tried to keep in trim shape as master of bowling and bocci courts.



1946



1951



1952



1953



1954

1942-Prayer gathering at Saint Patrick Cathedral, NYC [l-r] Anscar Parsons, David, Luke Crawford, Innocent Ferstler, Edwin Modicowitz, Fidelis Quinn, Marcellus Manzo, Damian Niedhammer, unknown, Venatius Buessing, Vincent Hetherington, Apollinaris Baumgartner, Sebastian Schaff, Austin Dubois;

1946- 25th Religious Jubilee with classmate Conrad Polzer; [above] 21 June 1953- 25th Priesthood Jubilee at Sacred Heart, Yonkers NY; 1954-Harold Higgins, David Alberici and Joseph Frank at Interlaken;

[Right] 1959- Third Order Convention at the Statler Hilton, NYC; Visiting Interlaken-Anselm Leahy, David and Brendan Morrissey



1959



1959

He was also in his day a very popular and much sought after guest on Namedays. In David's time, attending a Nameday was one of very few legitimate reasons for leaving the monastery for part of the day. On this score, John was also a master. Toward the end of a Nameday meal, after the good food and "spirits" had mellowed everyone, John would be called upon to render one of his many humorous and lively songs. Most famous of them were "King David," "The Dutchman's Band," and "Grandfather's Clock." For hours after a meal, he had everyone singing, if only to join in the verses of a particular refrain. At times, too, he entertained with his cello or violin. It was his gift and his pleasure to spread the spirit of Franciscan joviality among the friars.

While it may not have been too apparent in the last years of his life, Fr. David was gifted with a cautious sense of humor and a knack for creating a spirit of camaraderie. Perhaps equally not too well perceived in the latter years of his life, was the true significance of John's ostensible reaction to new ideas and to the younger generation of friars, whom he affectionately referred to as the "new breed." At times he would "put on a scandalized attitude to some new theological or moral concept, an attitude that would generate among the friars a Mack-Sennett comedy discussion in a vein of feigned seriousness.

Privately, John really did not know what to make of the changing world and changes in the Church. Rather than let it disturb his intellectual equilibrium, he used the changes in concepts and innovations in practice as a "straight man," poking fun at it through raised eyebrows, or by asking non-related questions, or responding with affected indignation, concluding with a studied shaking of his head at the "sad state of affairs."

But he really wasn't too disturbed. He had a strong faith, a simple trust, and a confident reliance in the Providence of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. John had the simple devotion of a shepherd to our Lady. How often did a confrere unexpectedly come among John fingering his rosary in some secluded spot? Francis of Assisi had an exceptional, realistic influence in his life. For 25 years, as Director of the Third Order, he instilled in the members of the Third Order, through preaching and writing, a genuine, active love for Christ. His spirit of trust and confidence in God, as well as the esteem in which he held our Lady and St. Francis, coupled with a great love for the Church, are clearly revealed in the beautiful, thought-provoking poetry he wrote and published in the Third Order Bulletin over a 25 year period. His poetry also appeared in the *Daily News*, *The New York Times* and in several Westchester newspapers.

David was basically a simple man, straight-forward, honest in his reactions, and sincere in his efforts. His spirit of prayer and devotion was child-like in its simplicity. He was spared the intellectual onus of difficult theological decisions, because, what the Holy Father said, and what the Church taught, became the rock of security for John.

The "divine delegation and trust" he accepted at ordination was the guiding principle of his priesthood. He lived 51 years as a Capuchin and 44 years as a priest. During these years, he experienced the joys of serving with Christ, as well as sharing in the sufferings of Christ as a member of the Mystical Body. Particularly during the last years of his life, Fr. David, cooperating with the designs and grace of God, bore courageously the heavy cross of his painful affliction. He was truly a faithful follower of St. Francis, and a worthy devotee of our Lady.

Where I to add that he was a perfect man, John would be the first to roll his eyes and shake his head in disagreement. No, he was not perfect, anymore than you or I. But he was sincere in his effort to become perfect. And because of that sincerity of effort as one "anointed" through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, our beloved confrere Fr. David, would repeat with us today the opening verse quoted from the Psalms: "Let Thy priests, O Lord, be clothed with justice; for Thy servant David's sake, turn not away the face of Thy anointed." Amen. May he rest in peace



1965



1967



1963

[Above] 3rd Order Directors Gathering at St. Francis, Garrison-1963: [top row] Graymoor friar, John Schug, Sigmund Hafemann, Ignatius McCormick; [2] Oliver O'Connor, Armand Dasseville, Brendan Morrissey; [3] David Alberici, Warren Smithbower, Zachary Grant, Thaddeus MacVicar, Noel Scanlon; [4] Peter McCall, Crispin Schoudele, Lawrence Stubbs, Raymond Hand and Douglas Smith;

Community of Sacred Heart-1966: Hugh Morley, Gregory Reiser, John Schug, Finian Sullivan, Sigmund Hafemann, Allan O'Brien, Dean Corcoran, Gereon Lindsay, David Alberici, Rufin Powers, Declan Finn, Barnabas Keck, Anthony Donahue and Claude Burns;

Picnic at Sacred Heart-1967: Aidan Neenan with David Alberici;

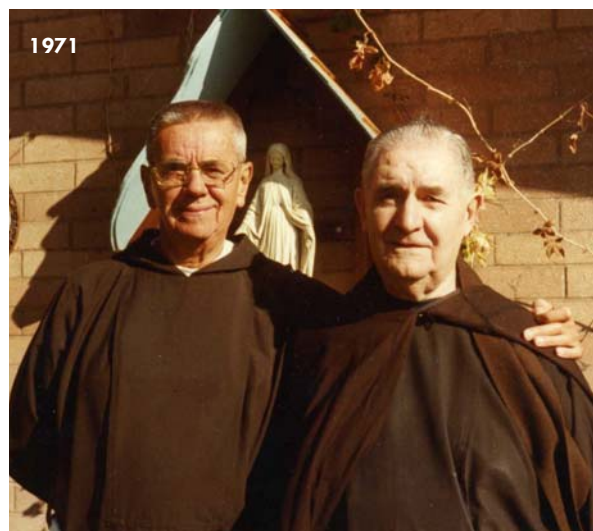
Visiting St. Pius in Middletown-circa 1971: Claude Burns with David Alberici



1966



1967



1971