

# In Remembrance of Father Sigmund Klimowicz, O.F.M. Cap.

1914-2010



*Wieczne  
odpoczywanie  
racz im dac  
Panie,  
a światłość  
wiekuista  
niechaj im  
świeci.*

*Niech  
odpoczywają  
w pokoju  
wiecznym,*

*Amen.*

**Father Sigmund Klimowicz**, a member of the Capuchin Franciscan Province of Warsaw, Poland, died on August 11, 2010 at St. Joseph Nursing Home, Yonkers, New York at the age of 96.

Fr. Sigmund (born Marian), the son of Adam and Janina Jabłońska-Klimowicz, was born in Żytomierz, Poland on June 22, 1914. He entered the Capuchin Franciscans on August 14, 1937 in Nowe Miastro n. Pilica (Poland).

Sigmund recounted some of his experiences during his formation years in conversations with our brother Charles Sammons [See accompanying article on next page].

Fr. Sigmund was ordained to the priesthood on August 12, 1945 in Versailles, France. He continued his studies at the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome until 1951.

Fr. Sigmund arrived in the United States as an Australian citizen in 1964, and ministered as a parochial assistant to several parishes in Passaic, Trenton, South Amboy and Bayonne, New Jersey. He became an American citizen on December 22, 1969.

Fr. Sigmund served as superior of the Capuchin Franciscan community in Oak Ridge, New Jersey from 1967-1973 and vicar of the fraternity from 1973-78 and 1979-1985.

In 1993, Fr. Sigmund ministered at the Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Bayonne, NJ until his retirement in 2005. On March 25, 2002 he became a guest member of the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Mary of New York and New England.

On February 14, 2005 he joined the friar community of Saint Lawrence Friary/Infirmary in Beacon, New York. He resided at St. Joseph Nursing Home in Yonkers, NY since June, 2010.

Fr. Sigmund was survived by a two nieces and one grand-niece who reside in Poland and London.

A wake was held on Sunday, August 15, 2010 at St. Lawrence Friary, 180 Sargent Avenue, Beacon, NY from 7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Saint Lawrence Friary in Beacon on Monday, August 16, 2010 at 11:00 a.m. Following the funeral liturgy, interment was at Sacred Heart Cemetery, Hillsborough, New Jersey.



1949



1951



1962



1969



1986



2005



This morning I learn that the blessings of the feast of St. Clare this week included the passing from this life of Fr. Sigmund Klimowicz.

I met Fr. Sigmund (or Zygmunt) when I stayed at one of our Capuchin infirmaries one summer. I went to work a little bit in the care of the brothers and also to prepare for the dreaded Weston Jesuit Latin exam that fall. Fr. Sigmund was a sweet old friar, still very Polish despite having lived many years in America, and very curious and interested in people. His eyesight was failing, so he wouldn't recognize you until you got close. Then all of a sudden: "Ah! Carlo! Carlo Borromeo!"

Fr. Sigmund discovered that I was partly in the infirmary as a way to have an environment free of distraction to work on Latin. He approved, believing strongly in the value of language learning, but was disappointed that I was not learning Esperanto. It had been a long time since he had met anyone with whom to practice. He used to say that his own ability of to speak Russian was a big help in surviving the concentration camp.

Fr. Sigmund (and if I remember rightly, some classmates with him) was a deacon when he was imprisoned. His stories from the experience were interesting. They were always horrifying, for sure, but were also tender in some ways. He once told me about how he made friends with a Jewish barber because he was the biggest and strongest man he could find. The guards were afraid of him, said Sigmund, so he felt safe with him. But then the story and the friendship ended when the man was shot.

My most memorable experience with Fr. Sigmund came on the day we celebrated the five Capuchins among the 108 martyrs of the Second World War beatified by John Paul II. As I perused the Ordo (the little annual book that gives the details for the Mass and Divine Office of each day) in the sacristy that morning, Fr. Sigmund came in. He took the book from me and began to go through the names of the *beati*. This one he could believe was a saint. Another one he lived with in community. At that moment I realized with astonishment that it was only chance that separated the old friar before me, living in the obscurity of a friary in upstate New York, from these martyrs being celebrated by the public cult of the Church.

From that moment on I began to look on him as a living martyr and myself as someone given the extraordinary gift of knowing him.

After liberation, Sigmund (and again, if I remember rightly, some other Capuchin deacons) had no province to go home to. They set out, looking for somewhere to complete their studies and be ordained. After their ordination, the friars eventually made their way here to the States and began a Polish ministry.

Among all the blessings God has given me through my life among the friars, meeting Fr. Sigmund is among those for which I am most grateful. *Requiescat in pace.*

### In Memory of Fr. Sigmund

*By Charles Sammons, O.F.M. Cap.*

I'm back from Fr. Sigmund's funeral, which was beautiful in its way. Hearing the eulogy and talking to friars before and after the Mass, I recalled some details that I had forgotten about Fr. Sigmund's life.

Sigmund was present at the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp. Having been there for five years, he used to say that he was scheduled to be shot the next day. After the war he dedicated himself to the hopefulness of the Esperanto movement, went all over the world promoting it, and was an Australian citizen when he finally came here to the USA.

I remember visiting Dachau. In the spring of 1993 I was supposed to be studying philosophy at NUI Galway. We had a month off for Easter, so a friend and I went over to the continent and wandered around. We had no plan nor itinerary, so we were never lost or off schedule.

Waking up in Munich one morning after a long evening of pretzel and beer consumption, we decided to make the short side trip to the concentration camp.

It was one of the eeriest experiences of my life. It was dusty and desolate. You didn't even want to talk. I remember seeing another tourist with his video camera going. It made me feel something like angry or sad. I wanted to say something to him, but again, I just didn't feel like speaking. I don't even feel much like writing about the experience now, but it does call out to me with something that I have come to believe, and which is at the heart of my own desire for God and conversion to Catholic Christianity: we human beings cannot trust ourselves to know what is good and right. We are too wounded. We need God.