



DECORATION OF PRIESTS' GRAVES

Editor's Note: The following article was submitted by NCCC Member Joseph B. Sankovich, Associated Catholic Cemeteries, Archdiocese of Seattle.

On paper, the names of the 129 deceased priests of the Archdiocese of Seattle buried in Calvary Cemetery seem like quite a few. But the perspective of Calvary is another thing.

Located in two relatively small areas just inside the entrance to the rolling cemetery, overlooking the north end of Lake Washington, the graves put into a new context the enduring nature of the priesthood: so very few serving so very many, for so very long.

They were immigrants, many of them: Irish, German, Dutch, French, Polish and others. Six of them were Redemptorists, members of the religious community which managed Calvary Cemetery when it was opened in 1888. The others were diocesan priests who served the frontier Catholic community of Western Washington in many ways: as pastors, chaplains, chancellors, writers and editors and teachers. Many of their names are now etched on parish halls, religious education centers, and in a few cases, street signs, in cities throughout Western Washington.

It seems like only yesterday that they celebrated the Eucharist, walked through the school yard, talked about the afternoon's round of golf, taught high school algebra, and couldn't quite hold back the tears when the school

children sang "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." But as one reads their grave markers, yesterday was long ago. And how quickly we forget.

But this Holy Thursday, the anniversary of the institution of the Eucharist, those priests, and the five former



Joseph B. Sankovich

bishops of the Archdiocese entombed in Holyrood Mausoleum, were remembered in a special way. Daffodils, daisies and greenery decorate their graves as a sign of "esteem, remembrance and thanksgiving."

The practice, initiated by Joseph B. Sankovich, Director of Associated Catholic Cemeteries, will become an annual observance. Next year, it will be expanded to include the decoration of priests' graves in Vancouver, Washington, and other locations; and those of priests buried with their families. Special memorial services are also being considered. "It is incumbent upon us to remember these men, who can easily be forgotten by the people they served," Sankovich explained. "We are their family, and we have an obligation to mourn them."

The responsibilities of a Catholic cemetery, Sankovich noted, are twofold: to bury the dead and to be a custodian of the community's memory, adding that it seems good for the cemetery to take an initiative in remembering those who held this leadership role in the community.

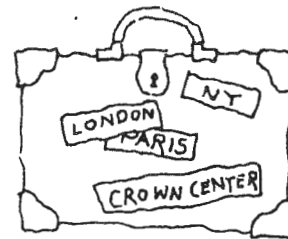
Sankovich said he hopes the practice will encourage the Catholic community to become more aware of its deceased clergy, to visit their graves, and to "say a prayerful thank you." He hopes, too, that the observance will motivate Catholics to recognize the priests who currently serve them. "We want to assure our priests that they won't be forgotten by the community for which they labor," he said. And, he added, he hopes this special remembrance will serve as a reminder of the importance of vocations. One hundred twenty-nine vacancies are a lot to fill.

Sankovich urges parish communities to continue to find ways to honor the deceased priests who have served them, and suggests a remembrance in Holy Thursday's Prayer of the Faithful, and the same remembrance, on the anniversary of their deaths. Next year, Associated Catholic Cemeteries hopes to provide all parishes with a chronology of their deceased clergy. Suggestions as to how Associated Catholic Cemeteries might best remember the deceased priests of the Archdiocese are welcome and encouraged, Sankovich added, noting that "this year's observance is only a beginning."

In keeping with the quiet simplicity of the grave markers in the priests' plots at Calvary, the tall cross marking their location says simply, "Deceased Clergy of the Archdiocese of Seattle." But those two pieces of land have a special kind of spirit, one which loudly proclaims "everyone who has given up home, brothers or sisters, father or mother, wife or children or property for my sake will receive many times as much and inherit everlasting life."

Also, beginning this year on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, the community plots of Sisters interred in the Catholic cemeteries of the Archdiocese will be decorated. Special memorial services are also contemplated. In addition to Calvary, Holyrood and Gethsemane, many Sisters also are interred in Vancouver, Washington, the former seat of the Diocese and the location of the former Providence Academy and other activities of the Sisters of Providence. Several Franciscan Sisters are interred in the historical cemetery of St. Francis Parish, Toledo, and Sisters also are buried in Calvary Catholic Cemetery, Tacoma, Washington.

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