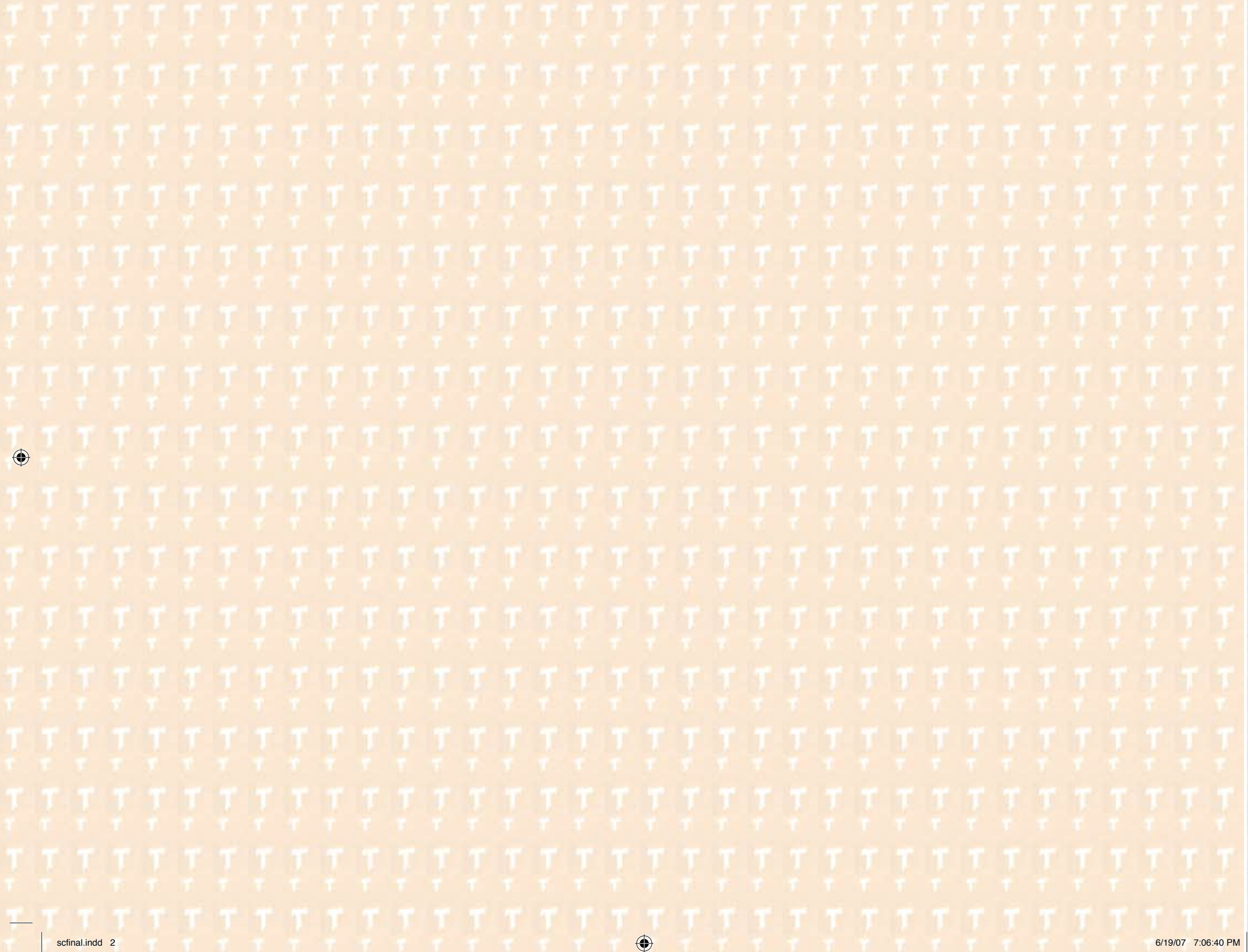


JOURNEY TO HOLINESS



A Pilgrimage through the Solanus Casey Center









JOURNEY TO HOLINESS



A Pilgrimage through the Solanus Casey Center

Concept and Text by Edward Foley, Capuchin

Development and Design by Maria Mariottini

Photographs by James Hollingsworth



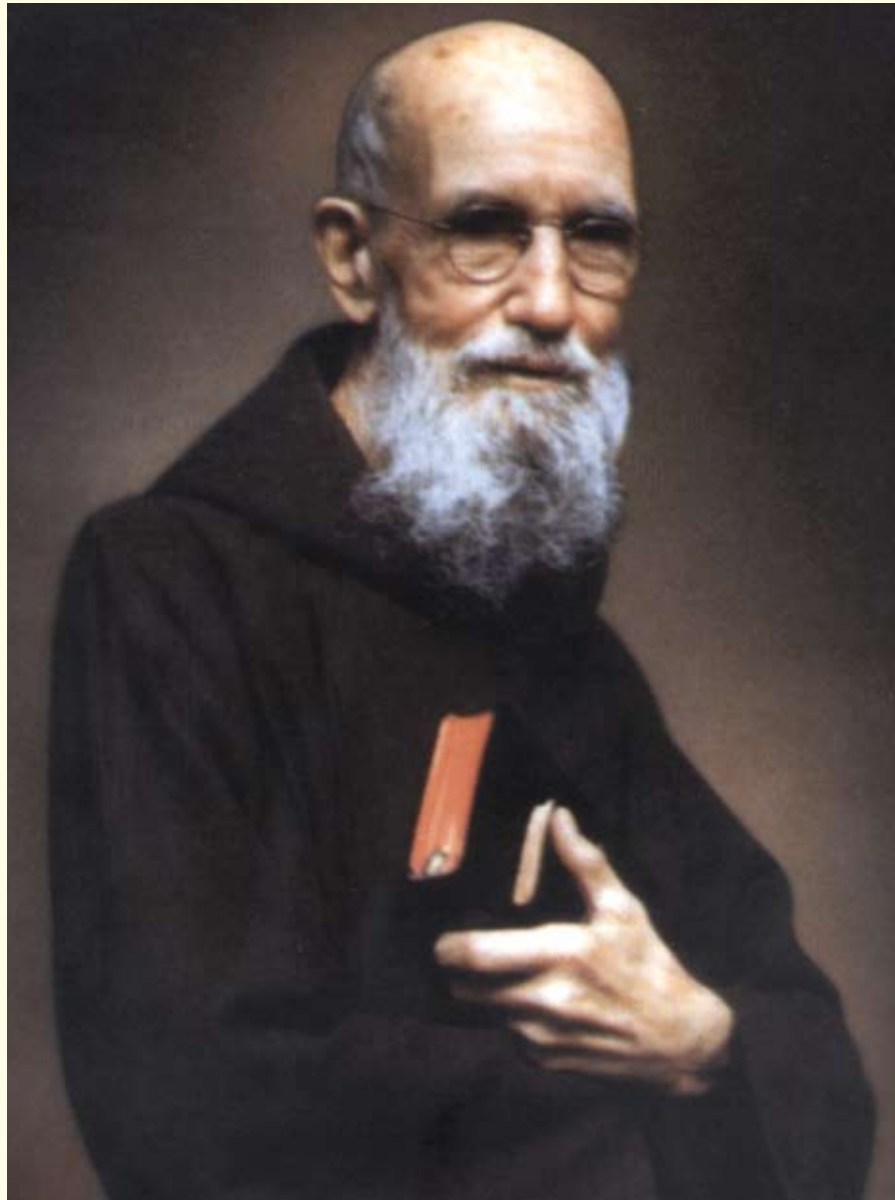
Thanks are due to Michael Crosby, Capuchin, for his invaluable help in shaping this project. We also gratefully acknowledge Mary Prete, Deb Johnston and the staff at World Library Publications in Franklin Park, Illinois for their professional and technical help in crafting the book. Finally, thanks are due to Br. Richard Merling and the Solanus Guild, especially for their help in acquiring archival photographs of Solanus Casey.

ISBN 978-0-9794394-0-7

Printed in Italy by Graphics TwoFortyFour, Inc.

Copyright © 2007 by The Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order, 1820 Mt. Elliott St., Detroit, MI 48207

More information on the Solanus Casey Center is available at <http://www.solanuscenter.org/>



THE JOURNEY BEGINS 1

THE CREATION GARDEN 2

THE DOORS 14

ENCOUNTERING THE BEATITUDES 18

THE CAPUCHIN FAMILY 26

CANONIZATION 29

THE CIRCLE OF SAINTS 30

THE TAU GARDEN 34

THE WORKS OF MERCY 36

THE TURN TO RECONCILIATION 46

THE MAIN CHAPEL 50

THE TOMB 52

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES 56







Sheep gate *When arriving at the Solanus Casey Center pilgrims are invited into processional paths from the different drop-off points. These lead through a "sheep gate." The image of a sheep gate is taken from the gospels in which Jesus refers to himself as the gate for his sheep (John 10:7). Artist Rick Findora has crafted a delicate wrought iron gate at this entrance point. It depicts the sun and the moon in the cloud drenched heavens.*

The Journey Begins

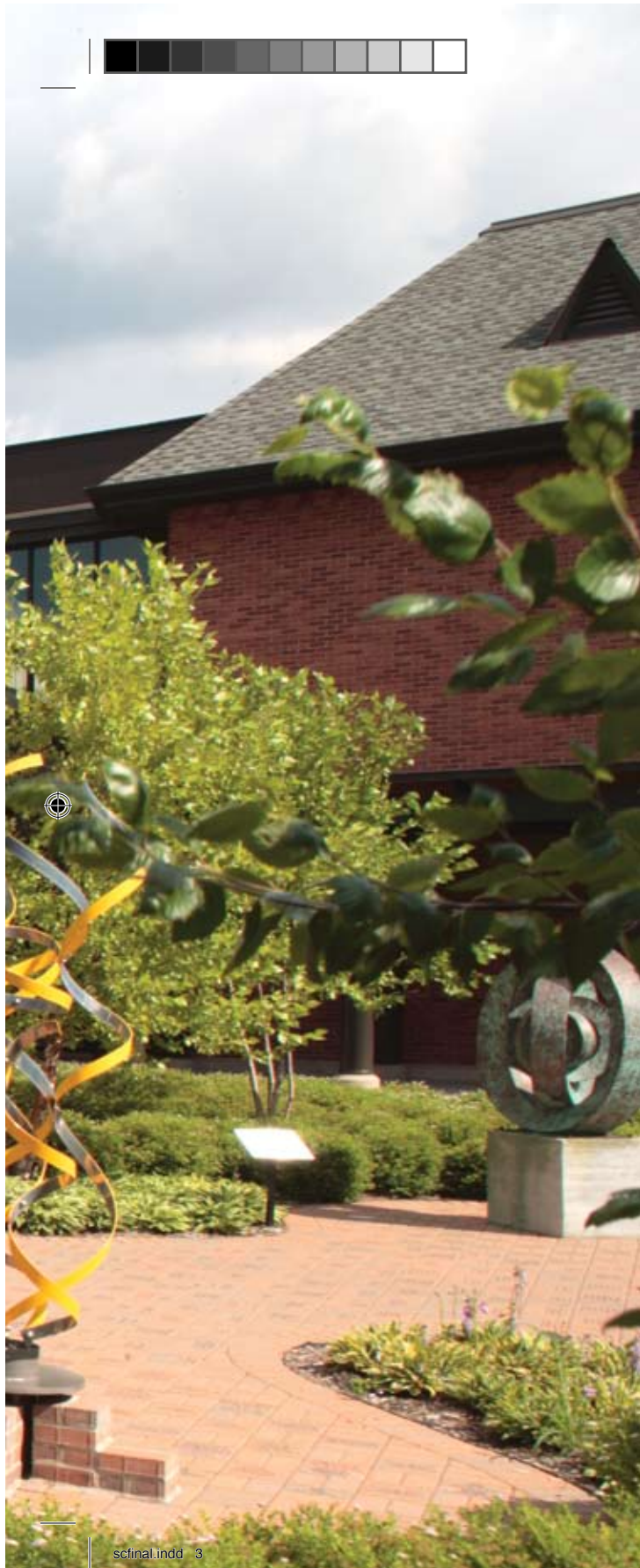
Each morning creation opens a door in the East as the sun begins its journey across the sky. This solar pilgrimage mirrors the travels and journeys of our own lives, as we explore relationships new and old, trek to work, meander a back road on vacation, or take a mental excursion with a favorite book or movie.

The Solanus Casey Center, however, speaks to a different kind of journey. That is the journey to holiness. It may seem an unlikely path for many of us, and at first it may appear to be a difficult or even lonely sojourn. Happily, this pilgrimage has already been made by an endless array of believers. They assure us that we will not be alone on this journey and, instead, will have many faithful companions and support along the way.

Christians believe that Jesus is the first guide to holiness. He called himself "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and invited us to follow him. Over the centuries an assembly of innumerable believers has taken this Jesus path to holiness. Most are remembered only by God. A few live on in our present memory. St. Francis of Assisi is one of the beloved of God who still captures our imagination with his love of creation, poverty of spirit and commitment to peace-making.

Solanus Casey was a son of St. Francis who also took up this journey to holiness. In the eyes of the world Solanus may not have appeared as much of a trailblazer, but this gentle and unassuming man touched thousands of lives. Because his path was so true and his vision so clear, his Capuchin brothers and friends created the Solanus Center as a place of pilgrimage so that the memory of his journey would live on, inspiring others to take up the path to holiness as simply and gracefully as Solanus did.





The Creation Garden

An ancient Chinese proverb teaches that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." While some pilgrims have literally journeyed a thousand miles or more to come to the Solanus Center in Detroit, Michigan, a new stage begins for each pilgrim when the wrought iron gate swings open, and we step into the Creation Garden.

Gardens are places of delight, refreshment, reflection and re-creation. They are arenas in which people work the soil, commune with the earth, and collaborate in the cultivation of vegetables and flowers, fruits and herbs. Gardens also have a special place in our religious traditions. The Book of Genesis tells us that God actually planted the garden we call Eden. According to that first book of the Bible, Eden was the place where God walked and conversed with the man and woman created in the divine image. While Adam and Eve were banished from the garden in the Genesis story, Eden remains a symbol both of refreshment and divine encounter. It is an image of eternal life and final communing with God.

While we know that Jesus worked as a carpenter and is not someone remembered as tilling the soil, the garden is yet an important image in the New Testament. It was in a garden not far from where he was crucified that his disciples had prepared a tomb and buried him. According to the gospel of John, it was in the garden that Jesus made his first appearance after the resurrection to Mary Magdalene, who actually mistook him for a gardener. Thus, the garden was the setting for Resurrection and endures in our religious imaginations as a symbol of Easter.



“CREATION IS GOD’S GREATEST GIFT TO HUMANITY. GOD’S GREATEST GIFT TO HUMANITY, AFTER CREATION, WAS REDEMPTION.”

The Creation Garden of the Solanus Center is designed as a place of refreshment and hospitality. It is set back from the noise of the street and the many demands of daily life. Here pilgrims are invited to slow their pace, quiet themselves, and breathe in the natural and artistic beauty of their surroundings. The Creation Garden is also meant to be a place of encounter, both with the God of all creation as well as with other travelers on the road to holiness. This modest reflection of Eden is a place of tranquility, where God’s presence can be perceived and praised.

St. Francis had a special gift for recognizing God’s handprint in all of creation. We are familiar with images of him preaching to birds and speaking with animals. Some of us even know his famous “Canticle of Creation” which is quoted, in part, on these pages. What is sur-

prising about that celebrated text is not only that St. Francis praised God through creation, but that his prayer suggests that creation itself praises God. St. Francis believed that sun and moon and wind and water are, with the rest of creation, a source of divine praise. This is because, in their natural beauty and power, all of creation reflects the goodness and splendor of God. As a consequence of his deep appreciation for the gifts of nature and the beauty of creation, Pope John Paul II officially named St. Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology in 1979.



The Casey family in 1892

A follower of St. Francis, Solanus Casey was born into a family of farmers. Both of his parents came from Ireland, and at first made their new homes in the northeastern part of the United States. That is where they met and were married in 1863. After their shoe business failed, Solanus’ parents joined other members of their family who had settled in Wisconsin. There they took up farming. The Homestead Act, passed by Congress in 1862,

enabled them to stake a claim for eighty acres of land near Prescott, Wisconsin. They built a log home along the Mississippi river, where five of their children were born. It was there, on 25 November 1870, that Ellen Casey gave birth to their sixth child and fourth son. His parents decided to name him after his father, and on the 18th of December he was baptized Bernard Francis Casey at St. Joseph's Church in Prescott. Later in life, when "Barney Jr." joined the Capuchin community, he followed the ancient custom of starting this new stage of his life by receiving a new name. It was then that he became known as Solanus.

Brother Sun is a seven-foot tall functioning sun dial. Constructed of welded stainless steel, with a brass dial plate and Gnomon (the rod which casts the shadow), it was designed and constructed by David Aho of Hibbing Minnesota.



St. Francis' Cantic of Creation

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your Creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun

Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every
kind of weather, through whom
You give sustenance to your creatures.

Praise be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

In 1873 the growing Casey family moved to a larger farm in the Trimble area of western Wisconsin. Barney, like his siblings, spent most of his youth working the family land. He and his brothers used to study their catechism while watching the cattle. "Sometimes," he wrote, "we'd roll rocks down the hillside ... or pick berries, or fish and swim till the cattle would stray away and get into mischief."

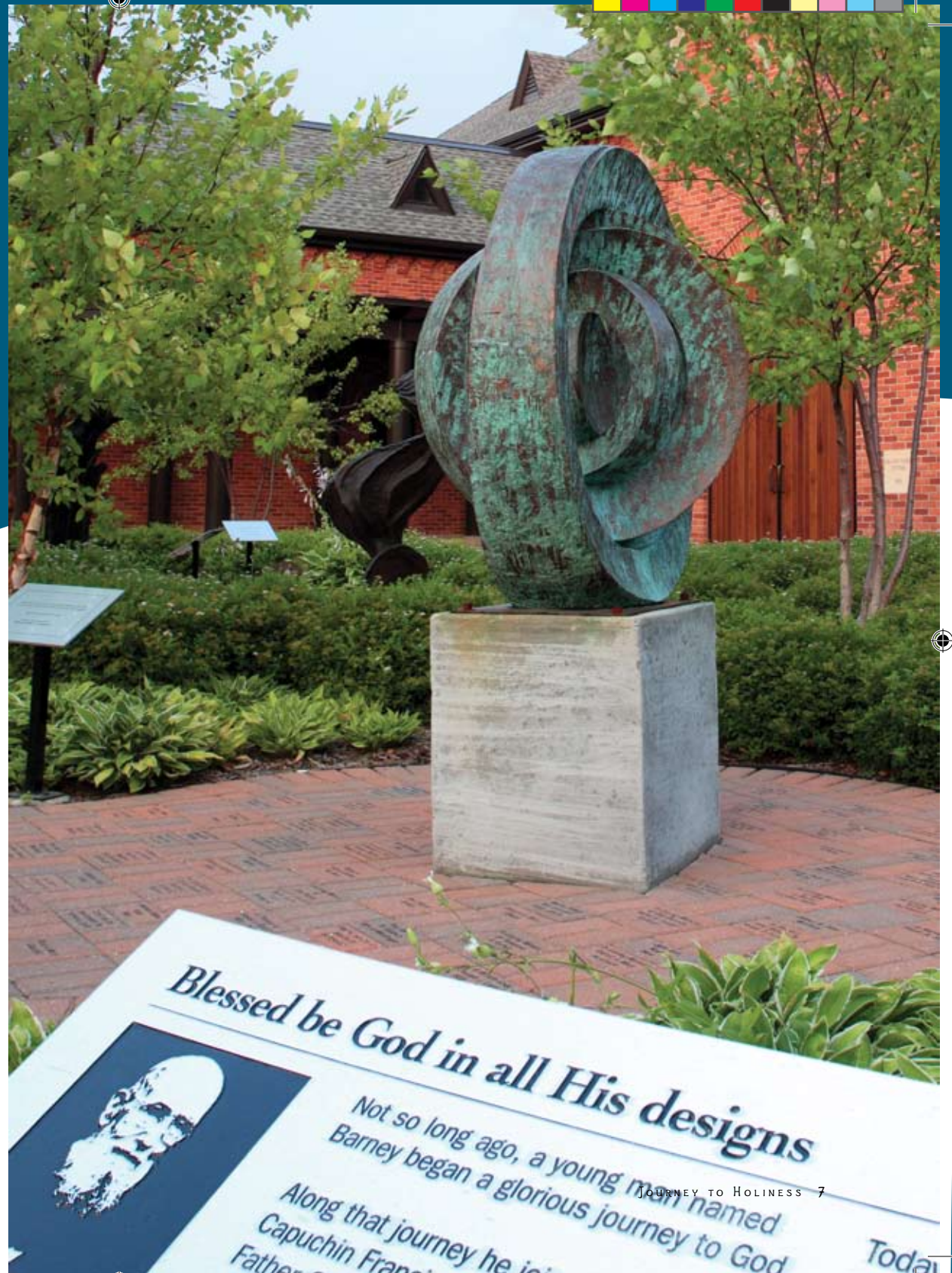
He later recalled that he had "never seen a picture – in Bible history or elsewhere – so nearly like an earthly paradise" as the area around the farm where he grew up. Early in his life it seems that Solanus exhibited a deep appreciation for the created world as both gift and blessing.

The Creation Garden was conceived and designed in view of the biblical story of creation from Genesis, St. Francis' love for nature and Solanus' deep connection with the created world. This is a place of hospitality and quiet. Here visitors and pilgrims are invited to slow their pace and enter into the spirit of peacefulness which pervades the Center today and recalls the spiritual journey that Solanus so peaceably made before us.

Yet, more than a place to relax after our journey, or seek refuge from the noise of the street, the Creation Garden is first of all a place where we can acquire insights and teachings that will aid us on our own journey to holiness. For example, in this beautiful spot, while admiring the landscaping and sculptures, we become acquainted with the spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving that was so obvious in the life of Solanus. One of his favorite phrases

was "Thank God ahead of time." These few words reflect Solanus' pervasive belief about the enduring generosity of God, who always provides everything that we need. Without being presumptuous, Solanus believed that it was absolutely appropriate to thank God before receiving some divine gift, knowing that in God's time all that is essential will be given to us. In the words of one witness, Solanus was "optimistic," and he "expected good things to happen." The first source of this optimism was God, whom Solanus was convinced loved him and all other creatures beyond measure.

Sister Moon is rendered in an abstract design by artist Nancy Frankel, of Kensington, Maryland. It is made from a manmade stone called "Design Cast," which is mixed with sand and cast in molds with layers of fiberglass. The resulting skin is assembled over a welded steel armature that is painted copper. The surface is finally treated with acid to achieve the patina effect.






Brother Wind was designed by African-American artist Woodrow Nash of Akron, Ohio. This "African nouveau" work, combining African and European influences, is a large wind chime. Its sides are etched with African animal insets.



One result of this deep faith conviction and spiritual optimism was Solanus' natural instinct to praise and thank God. While there certainly was a place for petition in his prayer life, Solanus was remarkable for the way gratitude consistently seemed to outweigh any preoccupation with petition in his life. There are many spiritual traditions that invite believers to begin with praise rather than petition.

Jesus was raised in one such tradition, and other Jews of his day understood the centrality of praise or "blessing." While Roman Catholics often think of blessing as something we do to sacred objects like rosaries or statues, Jesus and his Jewish ancestors understood that it was God who was before all else to be praised and blessed. There was even a law which said that every pious Jew had to speak 100 blessings every day. When hearing a rooster crow before dawn they prayed, "Blessed are you, God, for giving the rooster intelligence to distinguish between night and day." When they woke up in the morning they were to pray "Blessed are you, God, for restoring the souls to the dead." When they straightened up, they prayed "Blessed are you, God, who exalts those who are lowly." And when

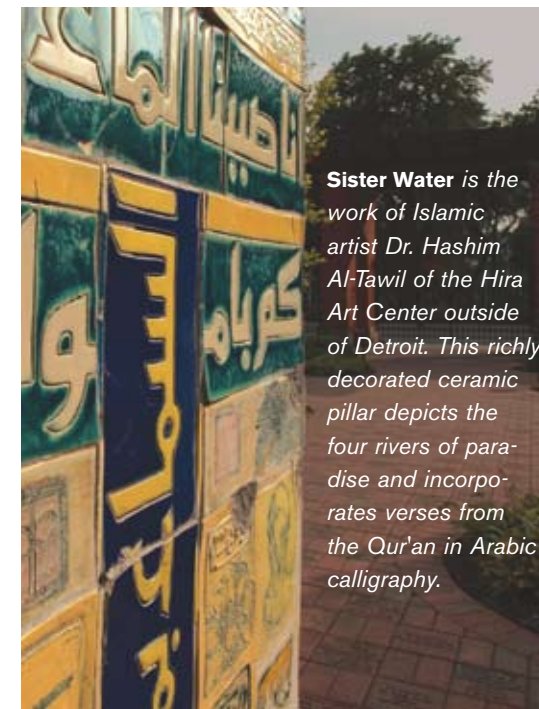


 “LET US THANK GOD AHEAD OF TIME FOR WHATEVER HE FORESEES IS PLEASING TO HIM, LEAVING EVERYTHING AT HIS DIVINE DISPOSAL, INCLUDING, WITH ALL ITS CIRCUMSTANCES, WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW HE MAY BE PLEASED TO DISPOSE THE EVENTS OF OUR DEATH.”

getting dressed, their prayer was "Blessed are you, God, who clothes the naked."

Standing in the Creation Garden, nature begins to lead us into this rich spiritual tradition that puts the praise and blessing of God first in our prayer. Creation is our teacher here, and as we absorb the beauty of the garden we recognize that creation not only gives us reasons for praising and thanking God, but that the created world itself joins in that praise. It might surprise us to learn that, in some strands of Jewish and Christian spirituality, creation is capable of adoration and praise without human intervention or speech. Thus, Psalm 148 in the bible invites the likely and unlikely of

creation to praise God. First to be invited are sun and moon, but then follows sea monsters and storms, stars and water, and every creature under heaven. None of these natural wonders are in need of petition, and the Psalm does not prompt them to ask God for anything. Rather, their power and natural beauty are a source of praise and blessing. Another celebrated example from the Old Testament which exemplifies this spirituality of blessing is the "Canticle of Daniel" (Daniel 3:52-90). Daniel's Canticle recognizes the duty of mountains and hills, frost and chill, wind and fire, and dew and darkness to bless God. By implication, every reptile, river, rhino and ruby are expected to sparkle and slither in praise.



Sister Water is the work of Islamic artist Dr. Hashim Al-Tawil of the Hira Art Center outside of Detroit. This richly decorated ceramic pillar depicts the four rivers of paradise and incorporates verses from the Qur'an in Arabic calligraphy.

This was the spirituality that marked the life and ministry of St. Francis of Assisi; it also provides insight into the gratitude and thanksgiving so apparent in the life of Solanus. When we look around at the artistic and natural beauty of the Creation Garden, we encounter the first of many invitations to holiness that await us in this place. We are being invited by sculpture and shrubbery, bricks and trees, art and architecture to take on a spirit of gratitude as we make our pilgrimage into God's generous love.

In this outdoor chamber of praise we are reminded of the prayers that Roman Catholics pray at Mass when the table is set and the bread and wine are brought to the altar. These prayers of pure blessing contain no intercession. Rather they "thank God ahead of time," not only for the gifts of bread and wine, but especially for what they are going to become for us as Christ's own Body and Blood. Standing in this garden of gratitude, we are also reminded of the "Holy, Holy" we sing at Mass. In that acclamation we admit that all of heaven and earth are filled with the glory of God, and that creation itself joins in singing "Hosanna" to the Holy One. Indeed, if we slow ourselves enough to savor this garden of praise, we discover that it is a place of prayer and worship. It is an outdoor chapel, where gifts of the earth and works of human hands join together in a cosmic liturgy of praise and blessing, inviting us to live a similar liturgy of praise in our own lives.



Brother Fire is conceived as a collection of painted electro-polished stainless steel abstract flames shooting toward the heavens. It was designed and constructed by Rob Fischer of Bellefonte, Pennsylvania.

There are many paths set out before us in the Creation Garden. Pavers wind through a landscape of rich shrubbery and river birch trees, leading to seven unique sculptures, especially commissioned for this garden. Each of these core elements of human existence – sun, moon, wind, water, fire, earth and death – recalls a key image from St. Francis' "Canticle of Creation." While individually they are beautiful works of art, in this garden of praise they are more. Together, they stand as a community of companions and pathfinders who offer to guide us in gratitude on our journey to holiness, despite all of its divergent paths.

Sometimes on that journey we do have the sun on our face and the wind at our back, as the old Irish blessing promises. Life's journey, as reflected in St. Francis' canticle, however, is filled with all kinds of weather. At times we may feel as though we are being rocked by powerful tides that do the moon's bidding, and we are occasionally blown off course and need some compass to help us find our way back. Most of us do not have to worry about finding water to quench our physical thirst, but the path to a source that will quench our deep need for meaning and direction is often more elusive.

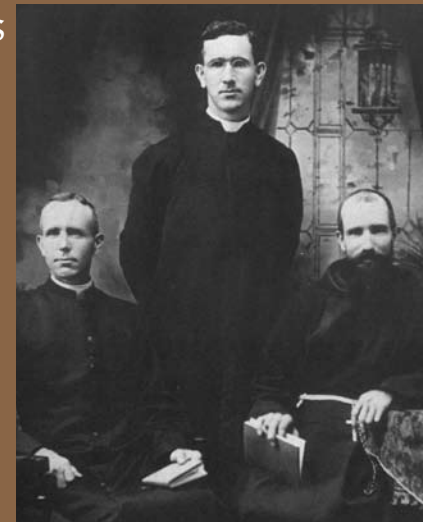
Three Casey Brothers

Solanus was the sixth of fifteen children, and he remained close to his family throughout his life. The great love Solanus received from them was a key reason why he could be so optimistic and grateful.

His older brother, Maurice (on the left), was the first son to go to the seminary in 1883.

Maurice's path to priesthood had its own twists and turns, however, and he was not ordained until 1911. He joined the Capuchin Order in 1929, but emotional problems eventually led to his departure. Throughout his many difficulties, Solanus remained a close and loving brother.

Edward is pictured in the middle at his ordination in 1912. Priest, professor and missionary to the Philippines, he and Solanus shared a special bond. Solanus often quoted from his poems and letters. Edward was one of the members of the Casey family who was with Solanus when he was dying, and he celebrated Solanus' funeral Mass.





Sister Death by Irish artist Fergus Costello is an abstract piece shaped from a 4,500 year old piece of petrified bog-oak wood. The wood, rising from a base crafted of Kilkenny slate, was taken from County Armagh in Ireland. Both of Solanus' parents were from Ireland, and his mother was born in County Armagh.

Ultimately, each us will have to embrace Sister Death who looms in the future. This metaphoric garden of praise and resurrection invites us to acknowledge and welcome the zigzags and detours that mark our lives. It assures us that no matter what the path, regardless of the time of day or moment in our lives, each step can bring us closer to God. Each path has its own blessings and reasons for gratitude and praise.

Solanus appreciated how God walks with us as we journey through life, and believed deeply that his own life was richly graced. He wanted to be a priest but did not plan on becoming a Capuchin. Yet, because of his poor grades at the diocesan seminary in Milwaukee, he found his way to Detroit in 1896 and a life as a Capuchin-Franciscan. He did not set out to be a sacristan or doorkeeper, but his persistent difficulties when studying theology prevented him from ordinary priestly ministry. When he was ordained in 1904, his was ordained a "simplex priest."

This meant that he had no permission to hear confessions or preach formal sermons. Thus, his first assignment at Sacred Heart Friary in Yonkers was as a sacristan, and a few years later he became the doorkeeper or "porter" there. This ministry of porter was one he would fulfill at various Capuchin houses throughout his life. Others might have considered these difficulties in studies or menial assignments as roadblocks to a satisfying life in ministry. Solanus embraced them as God's invitation to more poverty, richer obedience and deeper love. Each was an opportunity for gratitude and praise.

Even suffering and death did not deter Solanus from his path of gratitude and praise. On the 30th of July in 1957, the night before he died, he acknowledged that his whole body hurt. Then he said "Thanks be to God. I am offering my suffering that we might all be one. If only I could live to see the conversion of the world." In his words and actions, Solanus showed us that God can be praised



— and holiness discovered — even in the last turn of our earthly pilgrimage. Thus, a symbol of "Sister Death" rises in one corner of the Creation Garden. That dark shape, molded from petrified wood from Ireland, does not stand in this garden as an ominous warning. Rather, it is part of the chorus of praise along with fire, water, moon and sun. Jesus taught us that our final journey into God can be a blessing, and that death is a necessary step to life eternal. In this garden, we ponder that final journey of Solanus, whose spirit comforts and encourages us as we follow our own path to holiness in gratitude and praise.

Sister Mother Earth was created by Native American artist Johnny Bear Contreras of the San Pasqual Reservation in Valley Center, California. A member of the Kumeyaay Nation from the tribe of San Diego, his sculpture is an earth toned female figure, rising from the earth.



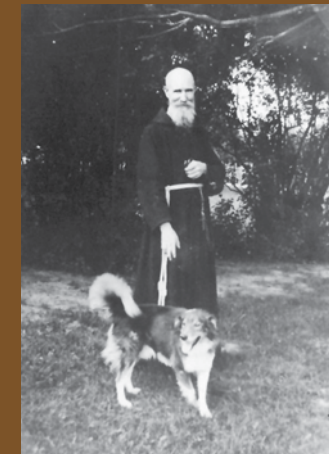


“WE COME
NOWHERE IN THE
PRACTICE OF VIRTUE OR
IN SPIRITUAL PROGRESS
WITHOUT HUMBLING
OURSELVES IN THE FACE
OF THE DIFFICULTIES
TO CHECK OUR
SELF-CONCEIT
AND PRIDE...”

The Doors

Most of us think little about walking through a door. It is a routine exercise that occurs often throughout our day, whether at work, out shopping, or in our own homes. Because they are so common, doors seldom attract our attention; rarely do we ponder the genius of their design and utility. On this pilgrimage to holiness, however, even the smallest item, the simplest moment or the most mundane object holds the promise of revelation.

In many ways Solanus was like one of those ordinary doors we pass through day after day without taking much notice. He was slim and physically unimpressive, whether dressed in his worn Capuchin habit, or the one old black suit he had brought with him when he first joined the Order and that he wore throughout his life. He was not a great mind as the world reckons those things, and his failing grades during his theological studies almost kept him from being ordained. Neither a gifted orator nor a great preacher, he was not even allowed to give formal sermons as a priest. Yet, 20,000 people came to his funeral, and hundreds of thousands of others have read about him, prayed for his intercession or come to visit his tomb.



Solanus Casey in 1935

While the reasons for remembering Solanus are many, they are well symbolized by his ministry as a porter. Solanus was not so much a door keeper as he was, in so many ways, a door opener. No one kept count of the number of times and many locations throughout his life that he answered the doorbell, welcomed someone into the waiting room, and listened to their stories. What people do remember, however, was his compassion, sensitivity and gentleness in his door opening ministry. In the process, Solanus opened a door to the sacred for many. As we journey through this place, he may be able to do the same for us.

Sometimes important people grant us an audience. They take a few moments of their precious time and allow us into their lives. Solanus seemed quite unconcerned about himself or his personal calendar. He was not someone who expended energy ushering people into his life but, instead, was a dedicated door opener to God. In his humility, he probably would not even allow us to think of him as a door or even a door opener, but maybe only as a hinge or a handle, helping us to swing wide the door who is Christ and walk in the presence of God.

Solanus' humble ministry of door opening, and his simple spirituality that directed people not to himself but to God, is symbolized by the doors that mark our pilgrimage from the Creation Garden into the main course of the Center. The outside door of unadorned wood recalls a simple Capuchin who opened people to the needs of their neighbors and invited them into closer union with God.



“ASK, AND YOU
WILL RECEIVE. SEEK,
AND YOU WILL FIND.
KNOCK, AND IT WILL
BE OPEN TO YOU.
FOR THE ONE WHO
ASKS RECEIVES. THE
ONE WHO SEEKS,
FINDS. THE ONE WHO
KNOCKS, ENTERS.”
MATTHEW 7:7-8





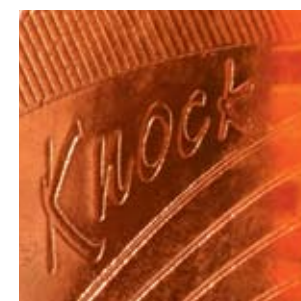
Passing through these wooden "Solanus Doors" we enter a small passageway where we come face to face with the "Christ Doors." These luminous glass doors, punctuated with the gospel words of "ask," "seek" and "knock," provide a warm and radiant threshold beckoning pilgrims into the main body of the Center.

The Christ Doors were designed by Stephen Knapp of Worcester, Massachusetts. The doors are made of kiln formed glass. Combined with the transom over the door they measure ten feet high and six feet across. River-like patterns on the doors and transom are punctuated with the gospel words "Ask," "Seek" and "Knock" (Matthew 7:7).

In all their luminosity these glass doors remind us that Christ is the eternal portal. When he offered himself in the humility of the Cross, he opened a new door in the wall of separation between God and us. In his Christmas sermon of 1999, Pope John Paul II spoke of Christ as the door of our salvation, the door of life, and the door of peace. His light beckons us forward. With Solanus' door-opening skills at our service, we pilgrimage from the Creation Garden into the First-born of all Creation. As we pass through these doors we are invited to enter into sanctity with and through our brother, Jesus Christ.






When he was just 26 or 27 years old, the first scriptural quote Solanus recorded in his notes was:



"Ask, and you will receive." The passage continues, "Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be open to you. For the one who asks receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters. Would one of you hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf, or a poisonous snake when he asks for a fish. If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks him" (Matthew 7:7-11).

Encountering the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes Crafted by master sculptor Karen Atta of New York City, eight contemporary figures were created to embody the Christian virtues reflected in Matthew's beatitudes. In creating these lifelike depictions, Ms. Atta first sculpted the heads of the subjects in clay, and then created the rest of the figures with body casts from live models. These two pieces were fired together in nontoxic fiberglass with an acrylic polymer base. The resulting sculptures are both inviting and challenging to the pilgrims who encounter these symbolic invitations to live the beatitudes.



Passing through the "Christ Doors," we find ourselves standing at the head of a long brick concourse. It feels like an indoor street. The entire length of this indoor thoroughfare is covered by an impressive skylight. There is also a reception desk to the right, and even a gift shop to lure the interested visitor. But for pilgrims who have opted for the journey of holiness rather than religious tourism, the true reception is a set of free standing, life size figures to our left. These are Christian guides and companions who encourage us to discover and live the beatitudes that were taught to us by Jesus.

A beatitude is a type of speech that begins with an expression of joy, such as "Fortunate are you" or "How honored are you." This announcement of honor or blessedness is often combined with a phrase that gives a reason for this joy. The Bible contains many beatitudes and there are a significant number of them in the New Testament. Some beatitudes are even part of our traditional prayers or proverbial wisdom. For example, when we say the "Hail Mary," we repeat the beatitude that Elizabeth spoke to Mary, her cousin, in the Gospel of Luke, "Blessed are you among women, and blest is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 2:42). If you have ever heard someone say "It is more blessed to give than to receive," they were actually paraphrasing a beatitude that St. Paul attributed to Our Lord (Acts 20:35).

Jesus speaks many beatitudes in the Gospels. Talking about the need to be watchful, for example, he says "Happy that servant whom his master discovers at work on his return" (Matthew 24:46). After the Resurrection, in his dialogue with the Apostle Thomas who doubted that he had risen, Jesus says, "Blessed are they have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29).

"Blessed are the poor in Spirit;
the reign of God is theirs.

Blessed are those who mourn;
they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the nonviolent;
they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for justice;
they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful;
mercy shall be theirs.

Blessed are the pure of heart;
they shall see God.

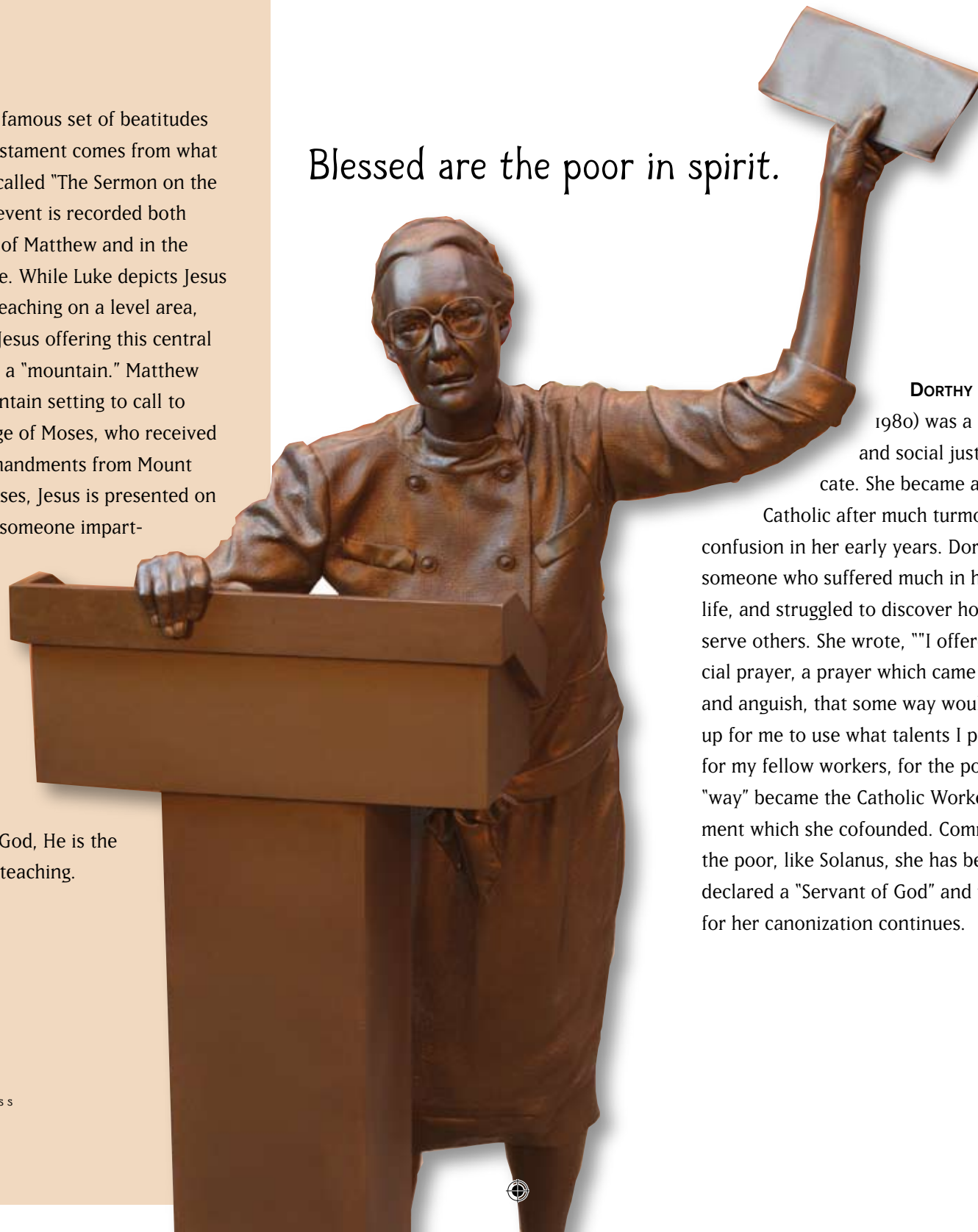
Blessed are the peacemakers;
they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who suffer persecution
for the sake of justice;
the reign of God is theirs."

Matthew 5:3-10

The most famous set of beatitudes in the New Testament comes from what is commonly called "The Sermon on the Mount." This event is recorded both in the Gospel of Matthew and in the Gospel of Luke. While Luke depicts Jesus offering this teaching on a level area, Matthew has Jesus offering this central teaching from a "mountain." Matthew uses this mountain setting to call to mind the image of Moses, who received the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai. Like Moses, Jesus is presented on the mount as someone imparting a central teaching from God. Unlike Moses, Jesus does not simply receive a teaching from God; rather, as the Son of God, He is the source of the teaching.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

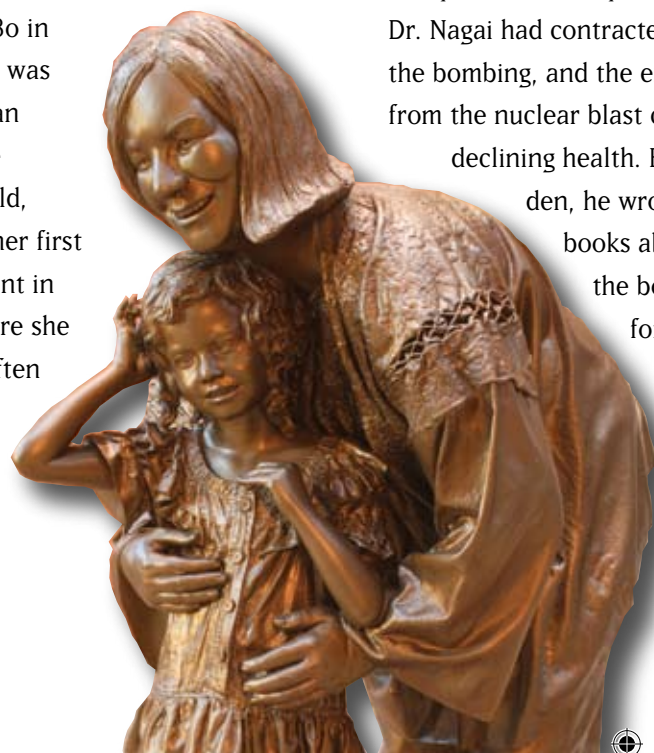


DORTHY DAY (1897-1980) was a lay woman and social justice advocate. She became a Roman Catholic after much turmoil and confusion in her early years. Dorothy was someone who suffered much in her personal life, and struggled to discover how she could serve others. She wrote, "I offered up a special prayer, a prayer which came with tears and anguish, that some way would open up for me to use what talents I possessed for my fellow workers, for the poor." That "way" became the Catholic Worker movement which she cofounded. Committed to the poor, like Solanus, she has been officially declared a "Servant of God" and the process for her canonization continues.



Blessed are those who mourn.

JEAN DONOVAN (1953-1980) was a Roman Catholic lay woman, born into a life of privilege. Early in her life she left a promising job in corporate America and became a lay missionary in El Salvador during a time of great unrest and oppression. Tens of thousands of Salvadorians were being kidnapped and killed. It was common to find bodies left along the roadside. Jean and her coworkers often picked up the bodies to bury them. They also offered consolation to the many people searching for relatives who had been kidnapped or disappeared. Jean and three women religious were murdered in 1980 in El Salvador. She was 27 years old. Jean is depicted here embracing a child, reminiscent of her first parish assignment in El Salvador where she cared for and often played games with the children.



Blessed are the nonviolent.

DR. TAKASHI NAGAI (1908-1951) was a Japanese physician who converted to Catholicism early in his medical career. Nagai worked in radiology at Nagasaki Medical College where he was seriously injured by the atomic bomb blast of 9 August 1945. Despite these injuries, he and his colleagues selflessly assisted many victims of the bombing. Dr. Nagai had contracted leukemia before the bombing, and the exposure to radiation from the nuclear blast contributed to his declining health. Eventually bedridden, he wrote many articles and books about the violence of the bombing and the need for world peace before he died. At the end of his life he was known as the "Saint of Nagasaki."



The Trolley Story

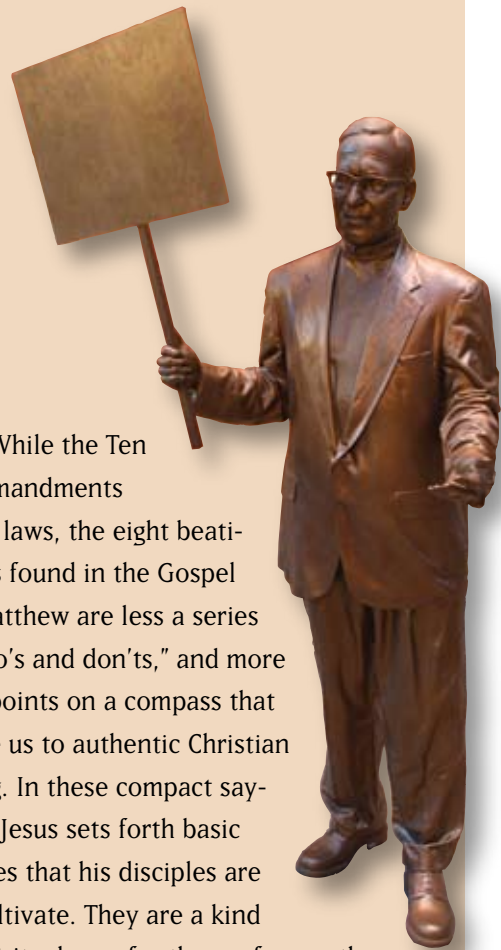
Solanus' biographers relate a significant event which happened to 20 year old "Barney" when he was working as a conductor on a trolley car in Superior, Wisconsin. In the Fall of 1891, the trolley with Barney aboard came to a sudden stop in a rough area of the city. There a drunken sailor was standing over a woman on the track with a knife in his hand, cursing the woman on the ground. Though a few moments later policemen arrived and disarmed the drunk at gun point, Barney Casey was quite shaken by the experience.

As one biographer writes, "He realized that this was not just an isolated incident, but revelation of the wider violence and anger in the world beyond Superior. As he prayed for the woman and her assailant, Barney began to feel that he could not just pray to bring about change in the world. He, too, had to help make the world change. At this point he came to realize he had to redirect his life more radically."





While the Ten Commandments were laws, the eight beatitudes found in the Gospel of Matthew are less a series of "do's and don'ts," and more like points on a compass that guide us to authentic Christian living. In these compact sayings, Jesus sets forth basic virtues that his disciples are to cultivate. They are a kind of spiritual map for those of us on the journey to holiness. Like the divergent paths we encountered in the Creation Garden, these spiritual guides admit that, at different moments in our pilgrimage toward blessedness, different virtues must be exercised or strengthened.



Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.

MONSIGNOR CLEMENT KERN (1907-1983) was an activist on behalf of workers. He was known as the "labor priest." Ordained for the Archdiocese of Detroit in 1933, he moved to Most Holy Trinity Parish in 1943, where he served for 34 years. A lead organizer of the Detroit chapter of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, Kern often joined union picket lines during strikes. He helped to establish a medical clinic for workers and persuaded lawyers to offer legal help to those who otherwise could not afford it. Retiring from the parish in 1977, he died in 1983 from injuries sustained in a car crash. When he died, the *Michigan Catholic* praised him for pricking "Detroit's social conscience, prodding politicians, lawyers, newspapermen, and labor leaders to become allies in his own war against poverty."

Blessed are the merciful.

MOTHER THERESA OF CALCUTTA (1910-1997) was an Albanian born Roman Catholic. In 1928 she joined the Sisters of Loreto and became a missionary to India. After 20 years of teaching at a school for girls, she embarked upon her work among the poor, eventually establishing the Missionaries of Charity Sisters who spread throughout the world. Later groups of brothers, priests and lay people were also established, with foundations in over 120 countries around the globe. Honored many times,

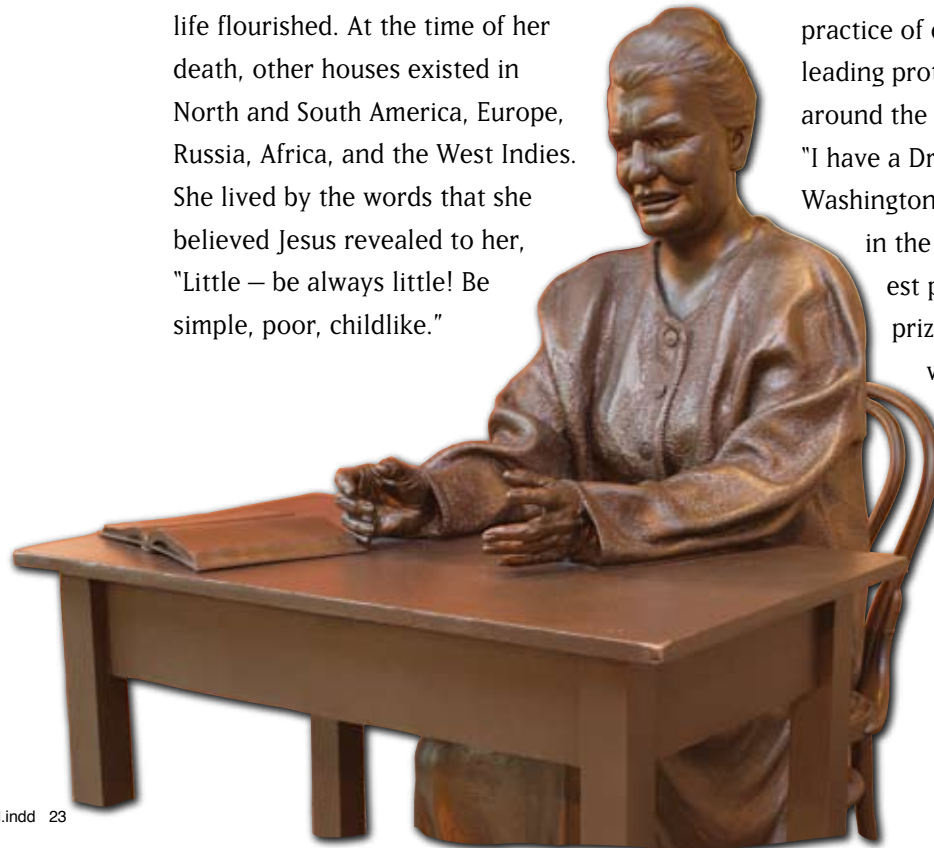
notably with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she humbly accepted these "for the glory of God and in the name of the poor." A woman of profound faith, committed to honoring the dignity of every human person, the Church acknowledged her beatitude when she was proclaimed "Blessed" less than five years after her death.





Blessed are the pure of heart.

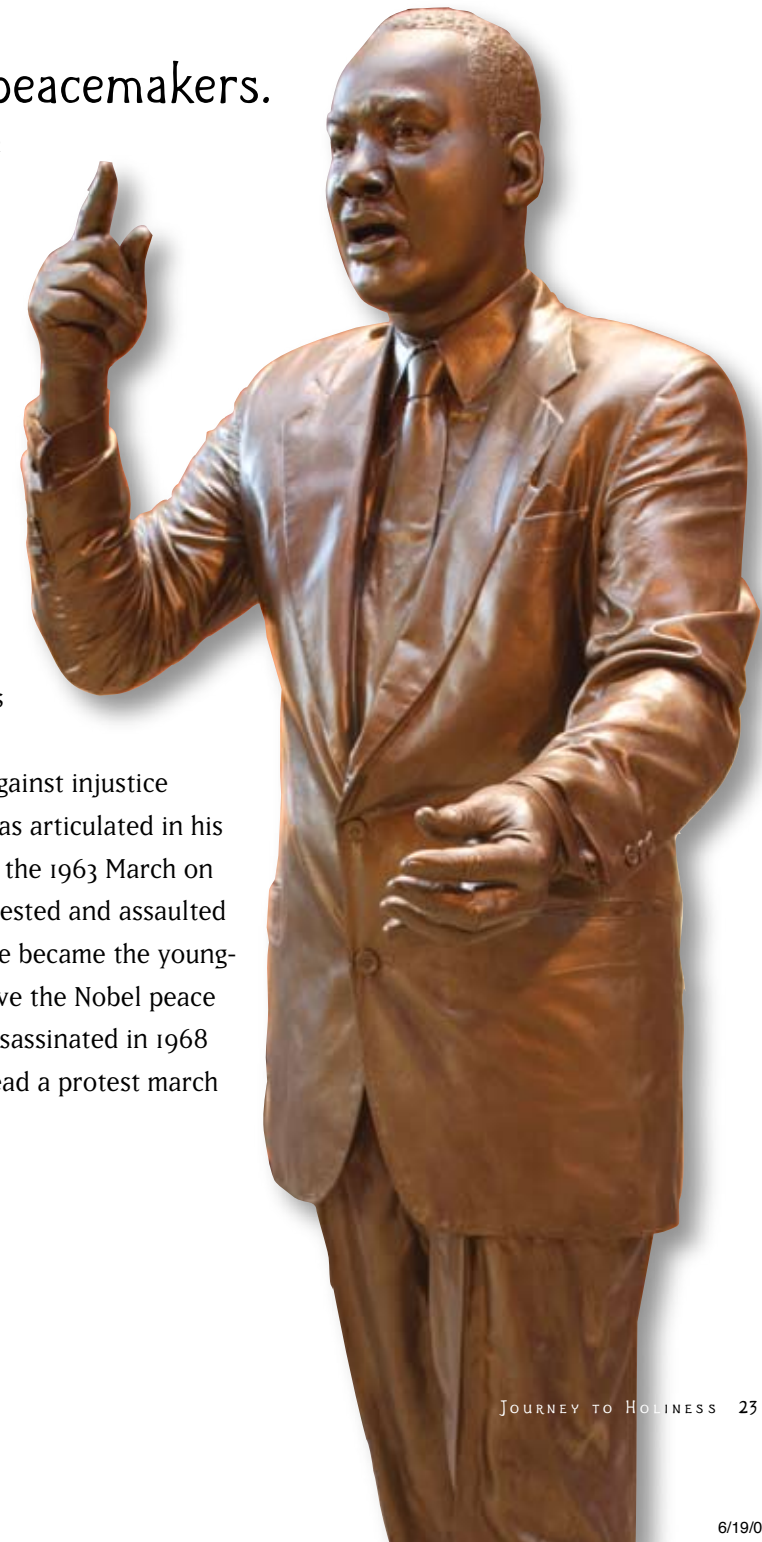
CATHERINE DE HUECK DOHERTY (1896-1985) was born in Russia to a wealthy and devoted Russian Orthodox family. A nurse during World War I, she became a refugee during the Russian Revolution. Eventually settling in Canada and inspired by the ideals of St. Francis, she sold her possessions and became a lay apostle in the slums of Toronto. Others soon joined her. After many trials and failures, she and her second husband, Eddie Doherty, founded the Madonna House in Combermere, Ontario, Canada. There her vision for living a radical gospel life flourished. At the time of her death, other houses existed in North and South America, Europe, Russia, Africa, and the West Indies. She lived by the words that she believed Jesus revealed to her, "Little – be always little! Be simple, poor, childlike."



Blessed are the peacemakers.

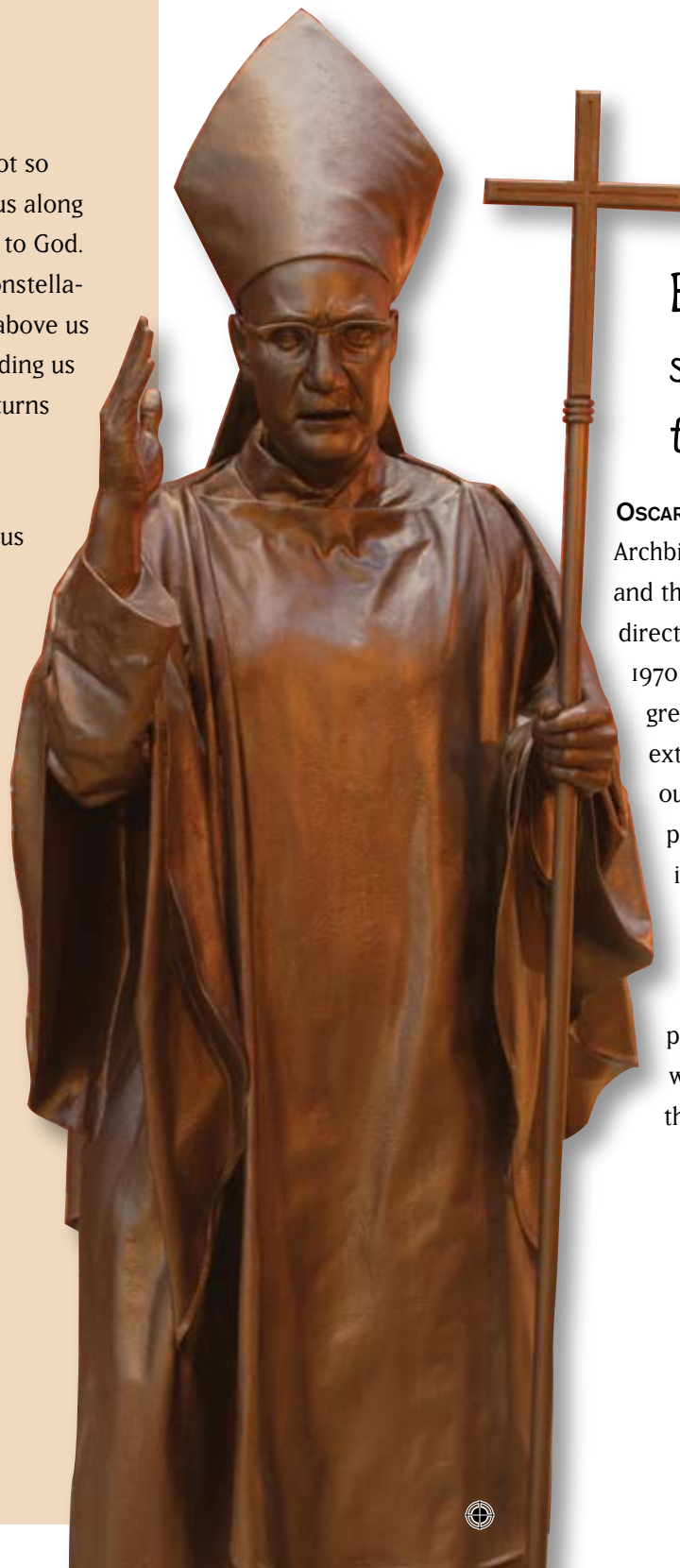
REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

(1929-1968) was an African-American Baptist Minister. A pivotal figure in the civil rights movement, he studied for the ministry and received his doctorate in theology. In 1955 he led the first Black non-violent demonstration in the 20th century, preparing the way for the Supreme Court to declare segregation on buses unconstitutional. He combined his Christian faith with Gandhi's practice of civil disobedience, leading protests and marches against injustice around the nation. His vision was articulated in his "I have a Dream" speech during the 1963 March on Washington, DC. Frequently arrested and assaulted in the cause of equality, he became the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel peace prize in 1964. He was assassinated in 1968 while preparing to lead a protest march in Memphis.



Thus, the beatitudes are not so much a road map that directs us along a straight and narrow highway to God. Rather, they are more like a constellation of stars, burning brightly above us in the living Spirit of Jesus, guiding us as we navigate the twists and turns of everyday life.

These sure guides were intimate companions for Solanus as he sought the path of holiness in his own life. One of his biographers notes that in 1945 he made his annual retreat so that he might "try again to be converted for another year." The theme of the retreat was "To imitate St. Francis, who so perfectly followed Jesus, our divine model." During the retreat Solanus wrote over nine pages of notes, including reflections on the beatitudes.



*Blessed are those who
suffer persecution for
the sake of justice.*

OSCAR ROMERO (1917-1980) was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador and an advocate for the poor and the other voiceless. A country pastor and seminary director, he became assistant bishop in San Salvador in 1970 and Archbishop there in 1977. During this time of great social injustice, most ordinary peasants were extremely poor. Church leaders like Romero spoke out against such injustice. Death squads killed many people, and the Archbishop was vocal in protesting these murders and leading the Church in documenting these crimes. He was assassinated while celebrating Mass. Weeks before his death, newspapers reported him saying "I am bound, as a pastor, by divine command to give my life for those whom I love, and that is all Salvadoreans, even those who are going to kill me."



TWO OF THE EIGHT BEATITUDES IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW ADDRESS ISSUES OF JUSTICE, AND THE INVITATION TO LIVE IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS. SOLANUS UNDERSTOOD THE CENTRALITY OF THIS VIRTUE, NOTING THAT “DISREGARD FOR THE CLAIMS OF JUSTICE, UNDER WHATEVER PRETEXT, HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MANIFESTATION, TO SAY THE VERY LEAST, OF SHALLOW THINKING, OR RATHER A BETRAYAL OF REAL THINKING. ONLY LOVERS OF JUSTICE AND TRUTH CAN POSSESS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, AND TO BE CHILDREN OF GOD WE MUST BE LOVERS OF JUSTICE, TRUTH AND PEACE.”

The Capuchin Family

Walking past the figures of the beatitudes and down the long indoor street that extends through the Solanus Center, we see the outline of a church in the middle of this long corridor. This ghosted structure, consisting of a simple wooden frame, is a symbol of the Capuchin community, whose brothers have been ministering in Detroit since the late nineteenth century. The Capuchins are followers of St. Francis, who lived in the thirteenth century. In the 1500's Christianity experienced a powerful reform. One result of this "Reformation" was that many Roman Catholic religious communities underwent significant internal renewals. One of these renewals took place within a group known as the Observant Franciscan Order. The renewal effort was led by Matteo di Bassi. In 1529 Matteo oversaw the writing of a constitution that called for a return to the primitive Franciscan ideals of poverty and simplicity. Those who joined him wore a habit with a pointed cowl or Capuche, which is the basis for the name "Capuchin." Capuchins came to

the United States permanently in the 1850's, and built St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit starting in 1883. It was in this monastery that Solanus began his novitiate in 1896. It was also from this place that he was buried in 1957.

Placing this framed church, a symbol of the first Capuchins in Detroit, in the middle of the main corridor serves as a reminder. First, it reminds the visitors that Solanus, like all of us, was part of a larger community of believers and travelers on the way to holiness. Solanus was a Capuchin; Capuchins are part of the Franciscan Order; Franciscans are people committed to living out their vocation through a particular form of religious life that emphasizes certain virtues and ideals. All members of religious communities in the Roman Catholic Church, whether they are Franciscan or Jesuits or Dominicans, women or men, together share a common baptismal call to holiness. They share this call with all other Catholics and Christians.

Each pilgrim that comes to this place, each traveler who passes through the Creation Garden and Christ Doors, every seeker of holiness who meets the beatitudes and walks through the framed structures of the church, recognizes that – like Solanus – we are also part of this larger and ancient pilgrimage to holiness. Even though we come from different cultures, places and religious perspectives, we are not alone on this journey into the mystery of God we call sanctity. Indeed, one of the purposes of a place like the Solanus Center is to encourage us along that path by introducing us to others who have made this journey, or are still traveling beside us on this way to holiness.

Ghosted Church *The main room of the Center is a large V-shaped brick concourse, approximately 132 feet in length and 26 feet high, crowned by a skylight, flanked by a tongue and groove ceiling of Douglas fir which runs the length of the room. The floor is a slate-like porcelain tile. The rich brown tones of brick, fir and floor in an elegant but simple room evoke the colors and simplicity of Capuchin life, and Solanus Casey.*



“WORLDLY
PEOPLE, SEEING US
DEPRIVED OF EVERY-
THING, WOULD SAY:
'CRAZY MONK. SILLY
CAPUCHIN.' BUT
ETERNITY WILL PRO-
CLAIM THE TRUTH:
'WE DO GOD'S WILL
BEST WHEN WE OBEY
AND CRUCIFY OUR SELF-
WILL EACH DAY.'”

In this place we find sure guides like the sun and the wind, we discover "hinges" like Solanus who swings open the Christ Doors for us, and we see in the beatitudes faces of a Japanese physician, an African American preacher, a Russian-Canadian mystic, and a small Albanian nun who point the way for us.

Sometimes going to a holy place can be an overpowering experience, because it contains images or relics of people whose virtue is so extraordinary and different from our own that it seems far beyond our reach. It is possible that encountering the saints can be discouraging, since most of us do not think we are capable of such sanctity. In this place, however, we are invited to stand shoulder to shoulder with something as commonplace as our Sister Water, and to learn the stories of dedicated but imperfect people who tried to live the beatitudes. We are invited to let Solanus, in all of his gentle honesty, whisper in

our ear that holiness can be ours as well. We just need to walk with him for a while.

So we momentarily step into the ghosted church, look into the display cases and see some simple artifacts from the first Capuchins who came to this place. Or we wander into the museum to the right and look at the picture of Solanus' family gathered for his parent's 50th wedding anniversary, or the story boards that outline his early life as a logger or work as a conductor on a trolley car. Each recalls something of the history that brought Solanus to Capuchin life, and brought this Solanus Center to life. We are reminded through these pictures and symbols that each one of us is part of a larger story. We, too, are part of a living tradition of gratitude and grace that accompanies us, even in the most mundane jobs and in the hidden parts of our lives, as we move down the corridor toward the circle of the saints.



The Golden Wedding Anniversary portrait of Bernard and Ellen Casey, in 1913. Solanus is seated to the right of his parents, surrounded by his brothers and sisters.

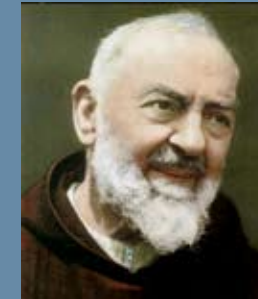
Canonization

As we travel down the indoor street of the Solanus Center, moving through the ghosted church and winding our way through the museum, we pass a display that provides information about "canonization." Canonization is the process within the Roman Catholic Church through which someone is officially recognized as a saint. Its various stages are designated by four successive titles which the Church confers upon someone: "Servant of God," "Venerable," "Blessed" and finally "Saint."

After his death, many people visited Solanus' simple grave in the Capuchin cemetery behind St. Bonaventure Monastery, which is next to the Solanus Center. Three years after his death, friends formed an association called the "Fr. Solanus Guild" to preserve his memory. This Guild was instrumental in promoting his cause for sainthood. Permission was granted in 1982 to begin the official process to determine if Solanus could be proclaimed a saint. That process started with an investigation within the Archdiocese of Detroit. As part of that process, the body of Solanus was exhumed from the cemetery, and placed in a permanent grave on the south side of the Church. After interviewing people and

studying his writings, Solanus was named "Servant of God" in 1966 by Pope Paul VI, and in 1995 Pope John Paul II conferred upon him the title of "Venerable."

While there are many people recognized as "Saints" or "Blessed" by the Church, the great majority of people who have lived faithful lives and made the pilgrimage to holiness are not remembered by name. The vast number of souls who are remembered only by God belong to what the Church calls the "communion of saints." We officially recognize this throng of the forgotten or unrecognized holy on November 1st, the Feast of All Saints. Walking this long corridor that leads to the Circle of Saints, we are reminded that our place is with them. And while most of us will probably never be considered for canonization, will not have our own individual feast day in the Church, or have a Center that bears our name, it is important for each of us to make this journey to holiness. Indeed, this common pilgrimage to sanctity by the baptized is a key mark of the Church and a central reason why, in our Creed, we can announce our belief in a Church that we call "holy." Solanus believed that living faithfully, each in our own way, brings us into "the peace of the saints."



Padre Pio was a Capuchin priest from San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy. Celebrated for possessing the stigmata or wounds of Christ in his own body, he died in 1968. He was declared a Venerable Servant of God in 1997 by Pope John Paul II. After the verification of a miracle, he was beatified in May of 1999, and after the verification of a second miracle, he was canonized in June of 2002 by Pope John Paul II.



Circle of Saints *The glass etchings of the saints are by Ken von Roenn of Architectural Glass Art, Inc. in Louisville, Kentucky. Each saint is depicted on a large panel of architectural glass (approximately 52" wide, and 92" tall), creating a hemisphere of sanctity in glass and light. This Circle of Saints overlooks a meditation garden, which contains a 4 foot tall sculpture of a Tau. To the left pilgrims can look across the enclosure through a clear glass window to the tomb of Solanus.*



The Circle of Saints

As we opened the Christ Doors at the top of the inside street that runs the length of the Solanus Center we encountered the beatitudes. These are the lifelike images of the eight 20th century women and men chosen to depict those virtues articulated by Jesus in the "Sermon on the Mount." At the end of the corridor, we walk into a semicircle of light, where eight officially recognized saints are presented in a gallery of glass. Like complemen-

tary bookends to the beatitudes at the top of the corridor, these women and men from across the broad landscape and history of Christianity are officially recognized examples of holiness. They have lived the beatitudes in an exemplary way.

The statues of the beatitudes on the other end of the corridor were crafted to human scale and visitors can stand eye to eye with them. Some of them are designed so that even children can



look into their faces. In this semicircle of light, however, the images of the saints appear larger than life and the figures etched onto glass reflect eight holy women and men in heroic scale. The larger-than-life representations are not meant to dwarf the visitor or make us feel small in their presence. Rather this hemisphere of holiness makes it clear that the journey into the beatitudes does magnify us in sanctity. As we grow in holiness, we contribute more to the holiness of the Church and the sanctification of the world. At the same time, these saints are represented on glass in all of their transparency. No saint, however great, is a source of their own holiness. Rather, each saint in their own way reflects the holiness

of God in Jesus Christ. So this gallery of the blessed allows the sunlight to flood through them, just as God's radiant light and Holy Spirit yearns to shine more and more through us as we journey in holiness.

The special friends of God in this gallery represent great diversity. They are from different cultures and times, they pursued very different life paths and individually they embodied the beatitudes in distinctive and memorable ways. Together, this gallery of the blessed gives another glimpse of the very different ways that holiness can be achieved. Some of these saints were very important to Solanus. For example, he had a great devotion to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the "Little Flower,"

who had died the year after he entered novitiate. Solanus read her autobiography nine times. Many believe that he saw in her simple life in the convent, filled with menial and ordinary work, an image of holiness that he could both appreciate and emulate. In one of his letters he commented that "she makes sanctity so really attractive and so beautifully simple."

While Solanus was clearly devoted to St. Thérèse, who was beatified and canonized in the 1920's, Mary the Mother of God was much more significant for him. There is even the story of a woman who often brought roses to St. Bonaventure's chapel and put them in front of the statue of St. Thérèse. After she would leave, Solanus would take half of them



"OUR BLESSED MOTHER IS ALWAYS COACHING POOR SINNERS ON THE ONE HAND TO CONFIDENCE AND PENANCE, AND ON THE OTHER, COACHING JESUS OUR LORD TO HAVE MERCY AND TO SPARE US. LEARN TO KNOW MARY THAT YOU MAY LOVE HEAVEN AND HEAVENLY THINGS."



St. Thérèse of Lisieux (d. 1897) was a French Carmelite. She spent her entire religious life in the convent and was a Sister for only 10 years. She wrote "Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love." She was named a patroness of the missions.


St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) was the founder of the Franciscan Order and thus the Patron Saint of the Capuchin-Franciscans. This "poor man of Assisi" is celebrated for his passionate love of Christ crucified, and his deep desire to live in total poverty and simplicity. The patron of Italy, he is also the patron of ecology in recognition of his great respect for the earth and all living things.

Mary the Mother of God is depicted as Our Lady of Guadalupe and Patroness of the Americas. This image recalls Solanus' great devotion to Mary, and is in recognition of the very large number of Hispanics and Hispanic Roman Catholics in the United States today. Solanus once wrote, "When Jesus is in our hearts, Mary will not be far away."

St. Clare of Assisi (d. 1253) was a friend of St. Francis. Born into a family of nobility, she heard the preaching of Francis and left her life of privilege to live in poverty and simplicity. An important collaborator with St. Francis, she founded the religious community known as the Poor Clares. She lived out her vocation as a cloistered religious for over 50 years. She is co-patroness of the Franciscan Family.

and put them in front of Mary's altar. One of the Capuchin Brothers joked with Solanus that he should not do such things, because it was stealing. Solanus laughing responded "I'm sure St. Thérèse will understand. She knows that the Blessed Mother comes first." The Mother of God was particularly dear to Solanus. He believed that she had led

him to the Capuchins. From very early in his life, he had cultivated a devotion to the Blessed Virgin, especially through the rosary. Besides the Blessed Mother and St. Thérèse, other saints were chosen as part of this hemisphere of holiness because they exemplify the Capuchin-Franciscan virtues that shaped Solanus, or they resonate in some other



St. Martin de Porres (d. 1639) was born in Lima, Peru, the illegitimate child of a Spanish gentleman and a colored slave. When he was 11 years old he became the servant of the Dominican Friars in Lima. Because of his virtue the prohibition against admitting people of color was repealed and Martin became a Dominican. He showed special care for the sick friars and was canonized in 1962.

St. Katherine Drexel (d. 1955) was born into a wealthy family in Philadelphia. Confronted by the plight of Native Americans and African Americans, she founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in 1891 to serve them. She also established many schools for this purpose, including Xavier University in New Orleans. Katherine was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

St. Joseph was the spouse of Mary and the foster father of Jesus. As the patron saint of the Detroit Province of Capuchins, he was a favorite of Solanus. He is depicted here as "St. Joseph the Worker," a man of humility and strength, who worked with his hands and through the sweat of his labor, provided both physical and spiritual shelter and nourishment to the Holy Family.

Elizabeth of Hungary (d. 1231) was the daughter of the King of Hungary. At 13 she married Louis of Thuringia. She used her position at court to care for the sick, even building a hospital near the castle. After Louis' death, she renounced her position, joined the Third Order of St. Francis and lived a life of penance and charity. She died when she was 24 and four years later was canonized.

way with Solanus' view of Christian life and ministry. Each of us has our own favorite saints. Some of them may be etched up here on the glass; others are not. Some of our favorite saints may be relatives or teachers who helped us to take our first unsteady steps on the path to holiness, and now themselves are living eternal life.

Other favorite saints of ours may still be with us, living examples of holiness who continue to inspire us in our pilgrimage to God. As we honor and imitate them, we have the potential to etch ourselves, as well, on the minds and hearts of others, as we grow as companions and even guides for other travelers who pursue the path to eternal life.



Through these glass windows, etched with the images of God's special friends, we look out onto a small meditation garden which contains a large sculpted "Tau." The Tau is a letter of the Greek alphabet (τ). Over the centuries the Tau has been used as a symbol for many things. Francis, like some Christians before him, took it as a symbol of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Francis was ever mindful of the love of God revealed in the passion and death of Jesus, and he wanted to imitate Christ the Crucified completely. So the Tau became his signature, as well as the shape of the habit that his followers wore, and a kind of coat of arms for the "poor man of Assisi."

Looking out into the meditation garden – whether that view is through the glass etched with the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Martin de Porres, Katherine Drexel or any other saint – the symbol of Christ's passion and death in the Tau is what we see. Looking through transparent images of saints reminds us that every time we see a true saint of God we see another unique example of God's love definitively poured out in the passion and death of Jesus. Every authentic saint can be thought of as God's signature on humanity, just as Francis was God's signature in the Tau.



Solanus instinctively understood that the path to holiness meant living the cross of Christ by accepting the crosses that come to us in daily living. He did this humbly and quietly in his own life. More than that, Solanus became a missionary through this idea, like St. Thérèse whom he admired so much. She never left the cloister, and he seldom strayed far from the monastery doors that he kept opening. But he became a missionary, because he increasingly called

others to go beyond themselves. In love he invited others to turn the difficult things in their lives into a saving grace. Solanus seldom, if ever, recommended that people take up new crosses. He knew very well from his own life that every path to holiness, every turn in the road offers enough suffering and has plenty of crosses planted along the way. So he called others to be more faithful, loving and even grateful in the way each carries their cross.





Embracing the cross does not mean that Solanus was a prophet of unhappiness or suffered from low level depression himself. Actually, his letters, like his many personal words of comfort and counsel, were filled with gratitude and hope. It was because of his hopeful vision of the Christian life, rooted in his deep faith in God's care and gracious love, that he could invite people to take up the cross and lovingly write the Tau in their own lives. Like St. Francis before him, Solanus firmly believed that taking up the cross could only lead to resurrection. Thus, taking up every cross for him was a gesture of hope. So we gaze through the glass images of saints and see the Tau, acknowledge again our own difficulties and uninvited crosses, and – with Solanus as a companion – begin to accept that each of these can also be a potential path to holiness for us.

Looking to the left through these images of the saints, we can actually see in the distance, through a clear glass window, the wooden outline of the tomb of Solanus Casey. Through these trusted and holy heroes, through these official saints, we gaze upon the final resting place of one whom many of us know to have been a man of great holiness. We look upon the outline of the tomb of the simple porter whom we hope will one day be officially proclaimed by the Church as a saint. We see the tomb of a simple man who lived all of the promise of the Tau and know that, with him as a guide, we can let God transform every obstacle, pain and cross in our own lives into a window that shines with the cross of Christ, and allows the splendor of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the world.



“IN THE CROSSES OF LIFE THAT COME TO US, JESUS OFFERS US OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP HIM REDEEM THE WORLD. LET US PROFIT BY HIS GENEROSITY. IF WE ONLY TRY TO SHOW THE DEAR LORD GOOD WILL AND ASK HIM FOR RESIGNATION TO THE CROSSES HE SENDS OR PERMITS TO COME OUR WAY, WE MAY BE SURE THAT SOONER OR LATER THEY WILL TURN OUT TO HAVE BEEN JUST SO MANY BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE.”



The Works of Mercy

Works of Mercy As the pilgrims face the hemisphere of light, on the wall behind them flanking both sides of the doorway are hung a series of 14 large murals. Crafted from glazed Pewabic ceramic tiles, these art works are symbolic representations of the "spiritual" and "corporal" works of mercy. Designed by local artists from the "Pewabic Tile Company," the works of mercy are depicted on tile murals approximately 3 feet across, framed with a partial rounded arch and fired in subtle pastels.



Entering the hemisphere of saints, our attention is first drawn to those impressive images etched in the glass in front of us. Of equal importance in this semicircle of sanctity, however, are the subtle murals that adorn the wall behind us. On one side are depicted what the Church calls the "spiritual works of mercy," and on the other side are the "corporal works of mercy." These traditional practices of the Church flow out of the two great commandments of love of God and love of neighbor. Close to his tomb, they also summarize how Solanus related to so many different people, with all of their spiritual and physical needs.

In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus is asked which is the greatest of the commandments, he replies, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." But Jesus goes further, and even though he had been only asked which was the greatest commandment, he declared that there was a second great commandment as well. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This teaching was consistent both with Jesus' other instructions as well as with the actions of his own life. If you really love God, Jesus taught us and showed us, then you must demonstrate visible love to your neighbor. This means not only loving your sister and brother but even your enemy as well. Christian love requires concrete action. Those actions can be gestures of care for another's physical well being, or concern for their spiritual good.

Behind us on the wall on the left leading to Solanus' tomb we find the seven spiritual works of mercy. While beautiful works of art crafted from local materials by local artists, the images of these traditional practices of charity also serve as further companions and guides on our own pilgrimage to holiness. They provide a tested path toward the



sanctity reflected in the lives of those etched on the windows before us.

Solanus is remembered as someone who consistently attended to people's spiritual needs. Even though he could not "hear confessions" or fulfill some of the other priestly duties often associated with spiritual care, Solanus exercised the spiritual works of mercy on a daily basis. In his own simple way he comforted and forgave, counseled and admonished, and always offered these services in a spirit of faithful and simple prayer. The many letters he left behind are filled with much instruction and wise counsel. While we know he had great difficulties in school and did not think of himself as very learned, Solanus was not shy about giving people advice. He did so not out of any sense of superiority, as though he had life figured out, but because he had such faith and hope that every need would be taken care of we if just put ourselves in God's hands.

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

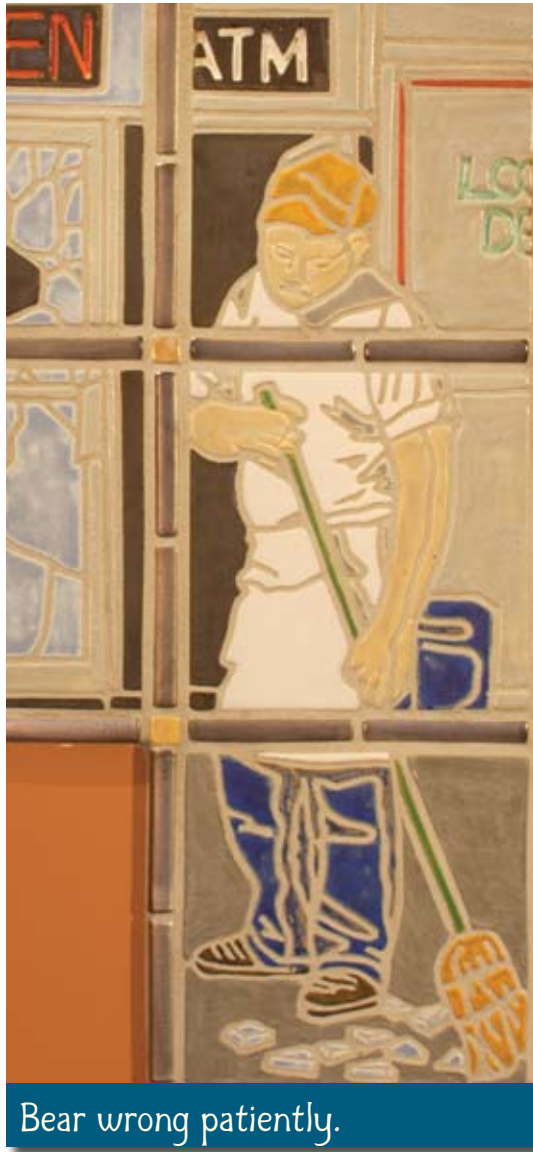
- Pray for the living and the dead.
- Bear wrong patiently.
- Forgive all injuries.
- Comfort the sorrowful.
- Admonish sinners.
- Instruct the uneducated.
- Counsel the doubtful.



Pray for the living and the dead.



Monsignor Edward Casey leading the prayers as Solanus is buried in the Capuchin cemetery in 1957.

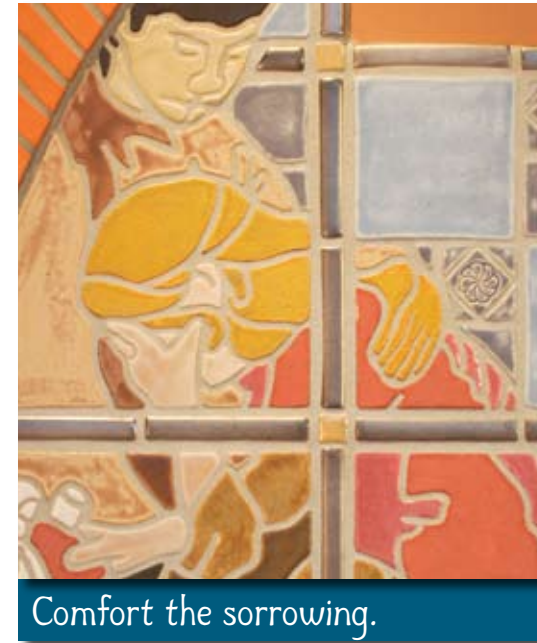


Bear wrong patiently.



Forgive all injuries.

Solanus sometimes found it necessary to correct and admonish those he felt were in error. His biographers note, for example, that after World War II he was a staunch anti-Communist, when there were so many people he considered "perverters of truth and justice" whose materialism and atheism made them "little better than fools."



Comfort the sorrowing.



Admonish sinners.



The Capuchin Brothers at the Solanus Center offer the ministries of counseling and spiritual direction to many visitors.



Instruct the uneducated.



Counsel the doubtful.



Solanus ministering to a couple in the front office at St. Bonaventure in Detroit in 1943.





“WHY SHOULD WE WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING. TUMORS? CANCERS? DEATH? WHY NOT RATHER TURN TO GOD, WHOSE SOLICITUDE FOR OUR INDIVIDUAL WELFARE — TEMPORALLY AS WELL AS SPIRITUALLY — PUTS ALL CREATED SOLICITUDE OUT OF THE PICTURE. WHY NOT FOSTER CONFIDENCE IN HIS DIVINE PROVIDENCE BY HUMBLY AND IN ALL CHILDLIKE HUMILITY VENTURING TO REMIND HIM — REMIND HIM IN THE PERSON OF OUR DIVINE BROTHER JESUS — THAT WE ARE HIS CHILDREN — THAT WE ARE, AND AT LEAST WANT TO BE RECKONED AS AMONG HIS ‘LITTLE ONES’; AND THEREFORE, THANK HIM FREQUENTLY, NOT ONLY FOR THE BLESSINGS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT, BUT THANK HIM AHEAD OF TIME FOR WHATEVER HE FORESEES IS PLEASING TO HIM THAT WE SUFFER.”

One of the most compelling aspects of Solanus' ministry was his concern not only about the spiritual but also about the temporal needs of people. Thus, as we consider the corporal works of mercy on the wall behind us to our right, we lift up an important thread in the narrative of Solanus' life. There are many stories of his comforting the sick, and less well known are his visits to people in a local prison, or his early history of even working in a prison in Stillwater, Minnesota. There he befriended the notorious outlaw Cole Younger, an accomplice of Jesse James, who gave Solanus a clothes trunk which he kept for many years.

Most enduring was his concern to feed the hungry. His biographers relate that during his very first assignment as porter at Sacred Heart in Yonkers, he was committed to feeding the homeless. There were even stories circulating around the parish at the time that Solanus was not allowed to answer the doorbell during mealtimes because if someone came begging for food he would give his own dinner away and then fast. Given his slender frame, it was not something people thought Solanus could afford to be doing.

The most famous symbol of Solanus' exercise of the corporal works of mercy – especially his concern to feed the hungry – is

The Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry.
- Give drink to the thirsty.
- Clothe the naked.
- Shelter the homeless.
- Visit the sick.
- Visit the imprisoned.
- Bury the dead.



The panel on the prison from the museum.



Give drink to the thirsty.



Clothe the naked.

The Capuchin Soup Kitchen



Solanus with other volunteers serving food in Detroit in 1942.



Guest being served at one of the Capuchin Soup kitchens in Detroit.

the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, which today serves over one million meals each year. It began in 1929, when Solanus was ministering in Detroit. After the stock market crash of that year, the number of people coming for food to St. Bonaventure Monastery increased dramatically. In light of that need, the Capuchin superior of the Monastery asked one of Solanus' brothers, Fr. Herman Buss, who served as spiritual director for the "Third Order" in Detroit, if Herman and the group that today we call "Secular Franciscans" could help. On 1 November 1929, Fr. Herman and members of the Third Order began serving people in the Third Order Hall. Solanus became one of the biggest supporters of what became know as "the soup kitchen," volunteering there often.

The building that housed the soup kitchen was taken down to build the Solanus Center. The old soup kitchen stood about where the cafeteria is located today in the new Solanus Center. The glass blocks in the new cafeteria – separating the kitchen from the dining area – were part of the original soup kitchen. They are symbolic reminders that the Solanus Center, in a figurative and literal sense, is built upon the spiritual and corporal works of mercy by Capuchins, the members of the Secular Franciscans, and all of the generous volunteers and donors that made that first soup kitchen possible and to continue to support the Capuchin's ministry to the poor. Today the Capuchins operate two soup kitchens in Detroit, as well as a warehouse that supplies clothing, furniture and appliances to the needy.



Glass blocks from the old Soup Kitchen incorporated into the Solanus Center Dining room.



Shelter the homeless.



“WE CANNOT FORGET THAT OUR WORKING IN RELIEVING THE MISERY AND POVERTY WAS MADE POSSIBLE ONLY BY THE WILLING COOPERATION OF ... BAKERS, WHO SUPPLIED THE BREAD, THE FARMERS WHO GAVE US THE VEGETABLES, AND OUR NUMEROUS FRIENDS WHO MADE DONATIONS FROM THEIR FAIRLY EMPTY PURSES.”



Visit the sick.



Visit the imprisoned.



Bury the dead.

Reconciliation *Within the Chapel of Reconciliation hangs a sculpture of Christ on the cross, embracing St. Francis. This is a traditional Franciscan image made famous by the Spanish Master Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). It has been reproduced and re-imaged many times. Here it has been rendered by Detroit artist Sergei Metrofanov in bronze and wood. The wooden cross is etched with the phrase "stretch out your hand to heal" from the Book of Acts 4.30. The text reminds pilgrims that we share in Christ's mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. The phrase is carved in four languages – English, Arabic, Spanish, and French – symbolic of the need for healing and forgiveness across cultural and religious boundaries. These are also the dominant languages around Detroit and its sister city across the river, Windsor, Canada.*





The Turn to Reconciliation

Standing in the hemisphere of saints, with the outline of Solanus' tomb visible to the left, many pilgrims instinctively turn in that direction, move past the murals of the spiritual works of mercy, and make their way to Solanus' final resting place. The journey to holiness, however, curves in many directions and another option presented to us is the path to our right, past the murals of the corporal works of mercy, and into the Chapel of Reconciliation.

For over a century "Confession" or the sacrament of Penance has been an important ministry of the Capuchin Friars at St. Bonaventure Monastery. Through the decades, countless lay people and clergy have come to this place to encounter Christ in this sacrament of healing and forgiveness. In the past, this ministry took place in traditionally

designed "confessionals" located in the Main Chapel. When plans for renovating the Main Chapel and building the Solanus Center were developed, it was decided to place a Chapel of Reconciliation along the hemisphere of the saints. This small meditation space contains two reconciliation rooms or "confessionals." These allow for individual experiences of the sacrament of Penance. This design decision was meant to emphasize the spiritual reality that no matter how our path winds through life, reconciliation is an essential part of every pilgrim's journey to holiness.

Sometimes Roman Catholics think about reconciliation only in relationship to the sacrament of "Confession," or to a particular penitential season of the church year such as Lent. Our tradition, however, teaches us that reconciliation is a much richer and more per-

vasive part of Christian spirituality, and that a reconciling spirit must radiate from every Christian heart. So it was in the beginning, when John the Baptist prepared the way of Jesus by proclaiming the need for repentance. Very early in his own ministry, Jesus announced that the onset of God's reign calls us to reform our lives and believe. Thus, when he taught us to pray the "Our Father" he taught us to announce that God's kingdom or reign is coming. In that prayer Jesus also taught us to offer a petition not only that we might be forgiven, but also that we would learn to forgive each other as well.

Jesus' mission of reconciliation was consistent and all-consuming. This is clearest when considering his continuous association with sinners, with whom he very often shared a meal. A significant consequence of this table



Peace Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy.

Oh Divine Master, let me not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive. It is pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Attributed to St. Francis

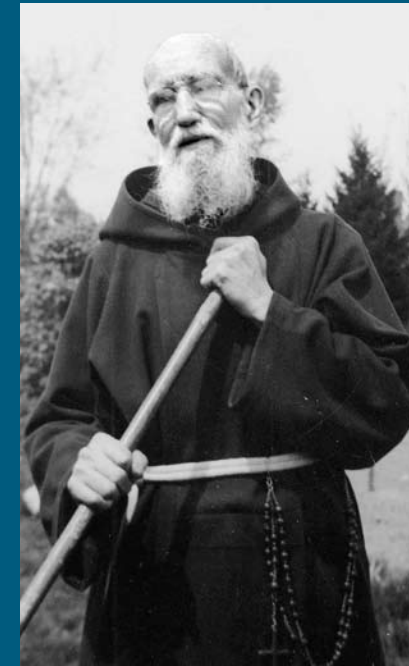
practice was that his critics constantly accused him of eating and drinking with sinners. His repeated association with sinners was offensive to some, but God's mission in Jesus was precisely to sinners, and not to those who considered themselves righteous or already in God's favor.

Happily for us, Jesus was not interested in shaming or embarrassing sinners. Rather, he embraced them while at the same time invited them to give up old patterns of sin and embark on his path of reconciliation. Besides individual conversions, Jesus was equally concerned to commission his followers to become a reconciling community and ambassadors of forgiveness. Thus St. Paul could write to the Corinthians that Christ has given us the ministry of reconciliation and has entrusted the message of reconciliation to his followers (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

It was in this tradition of being both reconciled and commissioned as a reconciler that St. Francis lived a life of humility and penance. St. Francis was well aware that he was sinful and flawed. Yet, because he accepted the grace to acknowledge his lowliness, he was freed through a profound personal and spiritual poverty so that nothing restrained him from calling others to be reconciled with God. His awareness and public admission of his own sinfulness liberated him to invite others to live and share the same reconciliation that he had experienced. This vision of Christian mission is summarized in the so-called "Peace Prayer" attributed to St. Francis.

Solanus' ability to be a reconciler was rooted in a similar poverty of spirit. He was not shy about admitting his own shortcomings. At the same time, often with amazing boldness, he could also point out the shortcomings of others. His biographers, for example, tell the story of a young man who asked Solanus to pray for a sick parent. Although others thought that this young man was a practicing Catholic, Solanus pointed out that he did not go to Church and insisted that he had not been to Mass in five years. To the peoples' astonishment, the young man admitted that this was true. Through Solanus' simple but forthright intervention, the young man changed his ways and redirected his life on a new path to holiness.

“GOD COULD HAVE FOUNDED THE CHURCH AND LEFT IT UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF ANGELS THAT HAVE NO HUMAN FAULTS AND WEAKNESSES. BUT WHO CAN DOUBT THAT AS IT STANDS TODAY, CONSISTING OF, AND UNDER, POOR SINNERS – SUCCESSORS OF IGNORANT FISHERMEN – THAT THE CHURCH IS A MORE OUTSTANDING MIRACLE THAN IN ANY OTHER WAY.”



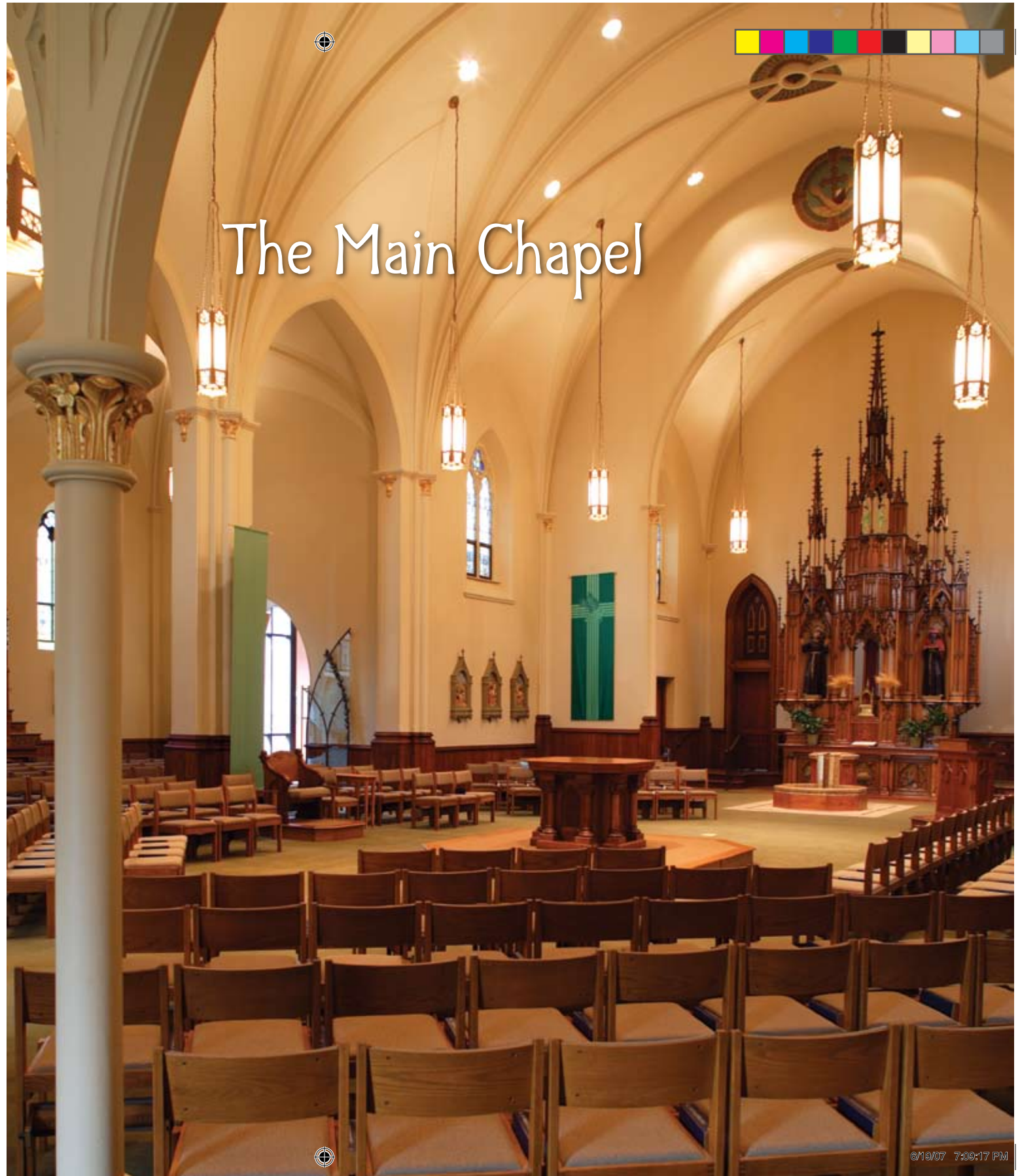
In his unassuming way, with a profound poverty of spirit, Solanus called many to be reconciled with God and their neighbor. Beyond these individual encounters, Solanus was also well aware that the Church itself was a Church of sinners on its way to holiness. This reality is recognized by the official Roman Catholic Rite of Penance, which speaks of the Church as holy but at the same time always in need of purification.

His awareness of individual and institutional sin never discouraged Solanus. Rather, it made his gratitude for God's forgiveness more profound. How grateful we should be to God who, with complete mindfulness of our weaknesses and sins, still loves us without reserve and showers us with graces – what an astounding revelation and source of the most profound gratitude. That is how Solanus lived his own life, as he persistently called others to live in the same sense of humility and gratitude.



The Main Chapel

The Main Chapel at St. Bonaventure Monastery is now integrated into the Solanus Center. With the help of liturgical consultant Andrew Ciferni, O.Praem., the chapel was renovated in 1983. At that time a new chapel for the Blessed Sacrament was created. In the course of the building of the Solanus Center, the Chapel was refurbished with new lighting, carpeting, and a sound system. At this time the new altar was fashioned out of two former side altars, the tabernacle was moved to its new placement under the bell tower, and a baptismal font was designed and installed. Richard Vosko was the liturgical consultant for this most recent renovation.



As we leave the Chapel of Reconciliation and continue on the corridor to the right, we find ourselves in the Main Chapel. This is the one room of the Solanus Center that Solanus walked, it is the one place in the current complex of rooms and corridors and spaces in which he prayed during his earthly life. In 2002 the Chapel was cleaned and painted, new lighting and carpeting was installed, and a new baptismal font was designed and installed in the Chapel. While today's worship space reflects the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, this refurbished Chapel also communicates an ancient truth about the liturgy, about the Mass that Solanus celebrated here, and about the Eucharist that today's community continues to celebrate in this place.

From the first time that Jesus offered bread and a cup of wine as his Body and Blood to his followers, every Mass has been offered, as Jesus said, "for the forgiveness of sins." Centuries before we had individual forms of "Confession" or an official sacrament of Penance, the first and original sacrament of forgiveness was the Mass. Here we are joined to Jesus' own sacrifice, and in mercy receive his divine presence. In a central and special way, we rehearse the journey to holiness through reconciliation every time we "go up to the altar of God," as it says in Psalm 43. Thus, it is appropriate that the path past the corporal works of mercy and the reconciliation chapel should bring us to the Main Chapel where reconciliation and forgiveness resound.

In the Museum of the Solanus Center today, pilgrims can view the chalice and paten than Solanus often used for celebrating Mass in the Main Chapel at St. Bonaventure.



The tabernacle, whose wooden setting was crafted out of materials from the old altar, now sits under the bell tower in the Main Chapel.

The original tombstone that adorned the first grave.



Some of the thousands of friends who attended Solanus' funeral on 3 August 1957. After the Funeral Mass, they processed into the Friars' Cemetery for the burial.

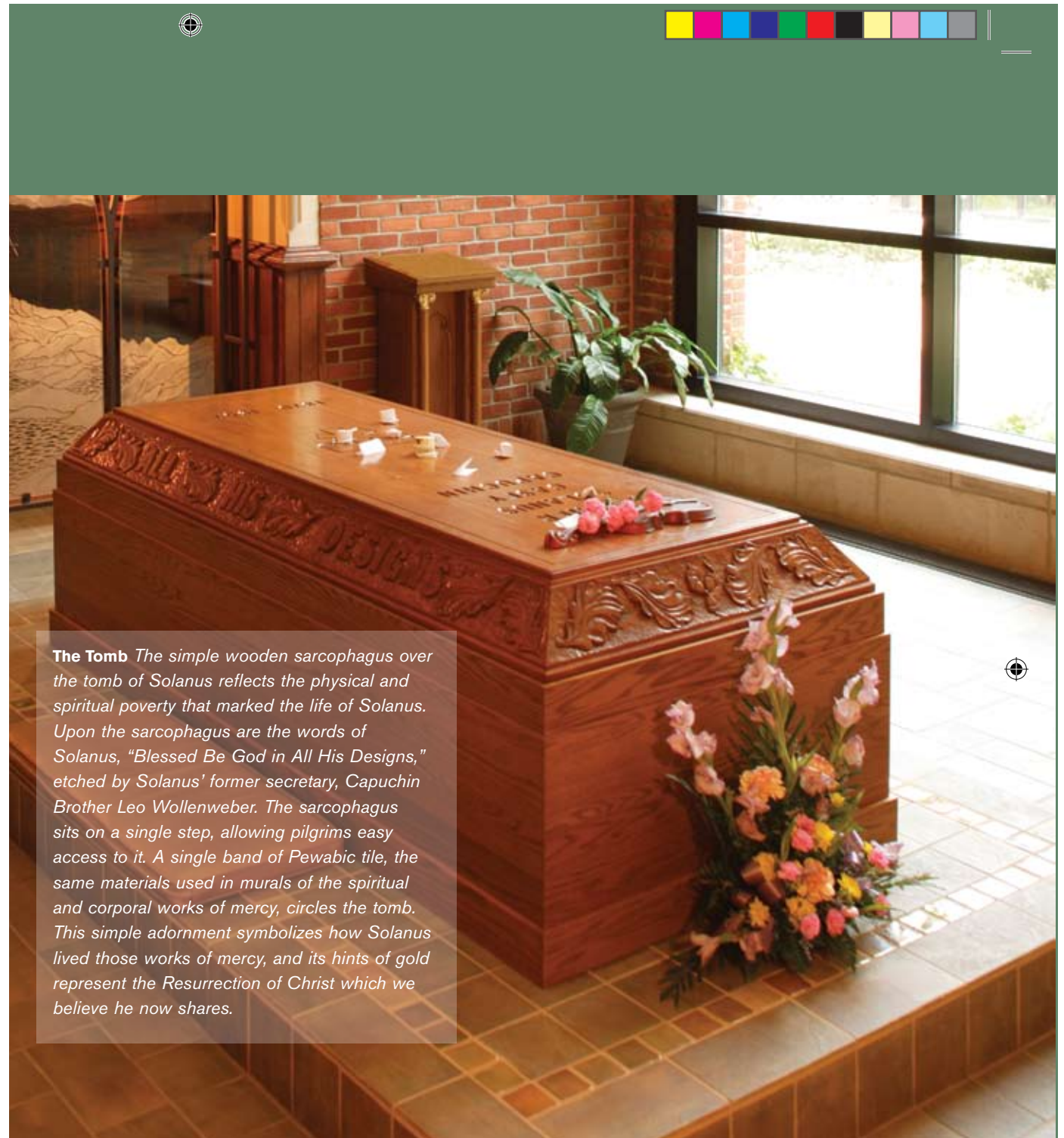
The Tomb

Another path in the hemisphere of the saints, past the spiritual works of mercy, brings us to the tomb of Solanus. For most pilgrims, this is a privileged moment during their time at the Solanus Center. Thousands have made this journey before, visiting the grave of this simple son of St. Francis. First they came to his grave in the Capuchin cemetery behind St. Bonaventure's monastery. Today, imbedded in the wall to the right, we can see the original tombstone that adorned this first grave. Since 1987 pilgrims have come to this new tomb area and final burial site. Before the recent renovations this was a side altar in the main chapel. Now it serves as a threshold and doorway between the Solanus Center and the worship space.

It is fitting that the earthly body of Solanus rests in this passageway. Sometimes, when visiting a shrine, the central relic like the body of a saint becomes the final destination. In this pilgrimage space, however, the tomb of Solanus is not the end of the journey, nor is it even meant to be the climax. Solanus has completed his pilgrimage, journeying from this life to eternal life. That journey is beautifully symbolized through the bronze and glass etched doors that lead from the tomb to the Main Chapel. Depicted on the glass is an image of the New Jerusalem from the Book of Revelation. This holy city on the hill symbolizes the promise of eternal life waiting for all who, like Solanus, journey with Christ from death to life.



That image is etched on a set of doors that we, like Solanus before us and St. Francis before him, are invited to walk through. These beautiful doors announce that our pilgrimage is not over; we still have steps to take in completing our own journey to holiness. Spending a quiet moment at the tomb of Solanus is an opportunity to give thanks for this simple servant who continues to touch the lives of so many. It is also a time and place for us to pray for the strength and persistence to complete the journey that lies before us, whatever its challenges and graces. Solanus' body may lie in the earth, hidden from view, but his spirit is alive in this place where he is still opening doors for us. This faithful porter, grateful for our visit, swings wide those gates of revelation and reminds us that we still have the poor to feed, the homeless to shelter, reconciliation to extend, and a peaceable world to shape and nurture. And so he ushers us to the door.



The Tomb *The simple wooden sarcophagus over the tomb of Solanus reflects the physical and spiritual poverty that marked the life of Solanus. Upon the sarcophagus are the words of Solanus, "Blessed Be God in All His Designs," etched by Solanus' former secretary, Capuchin Brother Leo Wollenweber. The sarcophagus sits on a single step, allowing pilgrims easy access to it. A single band of Pewabic tile, the same materials used in murals of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, circles the tomb. This simple adornment symbolizes how Solanus lived those works of mercy, and its hints of gold represent the Resurrection of Christ which we believe he now shares.*



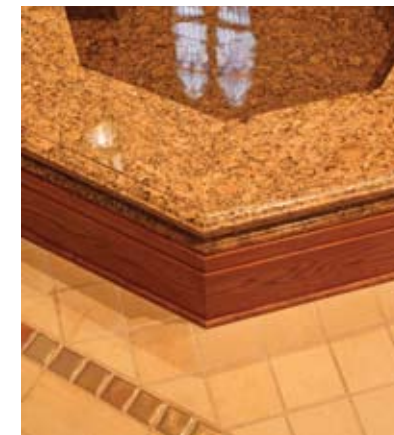
Revelation Gates *The tomb and its expanded transept is separated from the chapel by an elegant set of gates, crafted in bronze and glass. Created by Rick Findora – the same artist who created the entrance gates to the Creation Garden – these delicate doors provide a counterpart to the art marking the sheep gate. While the former symbolically depicted in wrought iron the wonders of creation and the Book of Genesis, these gates more delicately evoke the Book of Revelation, the city on the hill, the promise of eternal life and the collaboration of God with human hands in the urban enterprise. Solanus, who ministered and died in urban environments, was thought to be approving of these images of transition.*



Coming to the end of this journey through the Solanus Center, our holy porter reminds us of how far we have come this day. We recall that, in his companionship, we have been invited to join with all of creation in praising God. We have been encouraged to accept Christ as our way and truth and life and to embrace his beatitudes in all of their promise and challenge. We have been reminded that we stand in a tradition of holiness with the Blessed Virgin, Sts. Francis and Clare, and other sainted companions. That tradition is not static, but a brisk and life-giving baptismal current in which we learn to become companions in holiness for others. Inspired by the transparency of God's saints, we have also heard the call to be tireless in the works of mercy, and to do all things in a spirit of reconciliation.

Our instincts may be to linger here, where it is peaceful and comforting. So while we might stay awhile, Solanus is waiting for us at the opened door, reminding us that this is only an oasis on our pilgrimage to holiness. It is time to go, and get back to God's work. With Solanus we seek, knock and ask for the fidelity we will need to complete our journey. Finally, in gratitude for the Spirit of Christ revealed in Solanus' living and dying, we take our leave, and – with renewed purpose – walk through those doors of revelation.

What awaits us on the other side of those doors is a baptismal font, flowing with living water. Font and tomb belong together. It was in the baptismal font that we first journeyed into the tomb and died with Christ. It was there that we were washed and anointed for the pilgrimage to resurrection. Solanus fulfilled his baptismal call with unusual fidelity and grace. Now it is our turn. No matter where we are on our own pilgrimage, no matter what life path we have chosen, the power of that baptismal covenant and call remains with us. It was in the strong current of baptism that we were promised that God's Spirit would always abide with us. Empowered with that Spirit, we are commissioned to live in that stream of holiness as followers of Christ in service to the world.



The baptismal font, designed by Richard Vosko, is surrounded by a band of the same gold Pewabic tile that surrounds the tomb of Solanus.

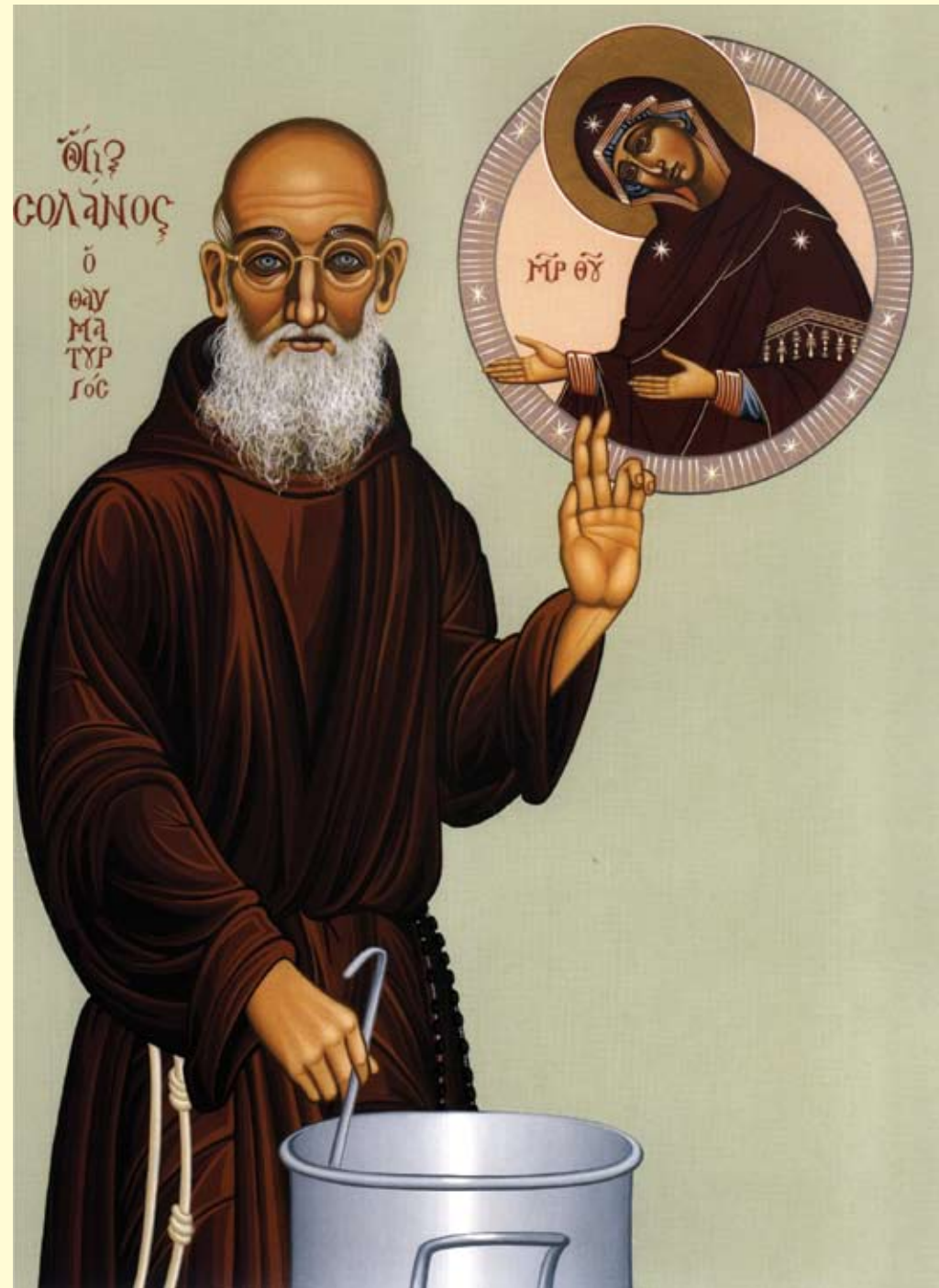


The Journey Continues



No matter what time of day it is as the world reckons time, when we leave the Solanus Center another day filled with Christ's reconciling Spirit dawns within us. As we made our way from the Creation Garden to Solanus' tomb, we recognized the simple and astounding gift of God's great love in the life of a simple and unassuming doorkeeper. In the process, we have begun to admit the renewed and astounding awareness that God's great love resounds in us as well. Holiness is an awesome thing. Yet, the God of Jesus Christ decided that it was not a gift limited to those few whom the Church officially recognizes as Blessed or Saints. Holiness is the common calling of all of the baptized, and that means us as well. While we might be surprised at this, Solanus is not. He knew it all along. He knew it in his own life, and in the lives of the many people just like us that he met and touched. And so, as we leave this place on a new day in our pilgrimage to holiness, his words echo in our hearts:

“IF WE STOP TO THINK AS WE OUGHT TO, THERE MUST BE WAYS AND MEANS CLOSE AT HAND WHEREBY, ACCORDING TO THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS, WE MAY IF WE TRY, ASCEND TO GREAT SANCTITY AND TO ASTONISHING FAMILIARITY WITH GOD EVEN HERE AS PILGRIMS TO THE BEATIFIC VISION.”





Acknowledgments

Information about Solanus' life, and citations of his words are taken from *Solanus Casey: The Official Account of a Virtuous American Life*. Ed. Michael Crosby. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.

"The Canticle of the Creatures" written by St. Francis of Assisi in about 1225. Trans. from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. I: *The Saint*. Ed. Regis Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William Short. New York: New York City Press, 1999. Page 1134.

Photograph on page 29 from the Archives of the Voce di Padre Pio; all rights reserved, used with permission for one time use in this project.

Icon of Solanus copyright © by Fr. William Hart McNichols. All rights reserved. Used with permission. For more information on Fr. McNichols' art, see <http://www.standreirubleicons.com/>.





DESIGN TEAM FOR THE SOLANUS CASEY CENTER

Lead Architect: John Justus of Hammel, Green and Abrahamson

Liturgical Consultant: Richard Vosko

Museum and Artistic Design Consultant: Mike Callan of DMCD

Landscape Architect: Paul Andriese of Grissim-Metz-Andriese Associates

Project Director: Larry Abler, Capuchin



