



Fr. Edward J. Bernacki, C.S.Sp.

October 25, 1918 - May 22, 2008

(Written by Fr. Michael Grey, C.S.sp.)

With sadness, we acknowledge the passing into Eternal Life of our brother, Fr. Edward James Bernacki, C.S.Sp. Fr. Bernacki died on May 22, 2008, at Hemet Valley Hospital, at 89 years of age. The funeral Mass was celebrated at Our Lady of the Valley Church on May 27, 2008, followed by burial in the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers Cemetery next door to the parish, in Hemet, California. Fourteen Spiritan confreres and priests from Southern California were in attendance. Fr. Silvio D'Ostilio, C.S.Sp. presided at the Vigil. Fr. Michael White, C.S.Sp. presided and preached at the Mass and offered the sympathies of the Congregation to the family and friends.

Fr. Edward and his family have long Spiritan roots. His first cousin was Fr. Walter Mroz, C.S.Sp. who served in Puerto Rico. His parents, Stanislaus and Salomea Mroz Bernacki were married at St. Stanislaus Church, founded by Spiritans and the first Polish-American church west of the Allegheny Mountains. The family settled down and grew in size and faith, in the Spiritan parish of Immaculate Heart of Mary on Polish Hill. Edward Bernacki was born on October 25, 1918. He had twelve siblings, six boys and six girls, John, Stanley, Joseph, Bernard, Harry, Mary (Majewski), Jean (Grzybowski), Josephine, Rose (Rhodes), and two infant sisters who died at a very young age. He is survived by Bernard, Harry and Rose, all of the Pittsburgh area, and by three generations of nephews and nieces.

Edward Bernacki studied at Immaculate Heart of Mary parish school, taught by the Holy Family of Nazareth Sisters and continued on to Central Catholic, taught by the Christian Brothers. In 1936, he entered Holy Ghost Missionary College in Cornwells Heights, Pennsylvania. Upon completion of his novitiate year, Edward made his first profession of vows at Ridgefield, Ct. on August 15, 1939. Theological studies followed at St. Mary's Seminary in Ferndale, Connecticut, where he earned his B.D. in 1946. The cold winters of New England provided plenty of icy opportunities for Edward to show off his skills at ice skating.

Fr. Ed Bernacki, C.S.Sp. was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Henry O'Brien, at St. Mary's Seminary on March 8, 1945. His First Mass was at Immaculate Heart of Mary in Pittsburgh. He made his Apostolic Consecration on June 15, 1946 and was assigned to the District of Kilimanjaro, East Africa, on December 12, 1946. He served 23 years in Africa, adding Kiswahili and a local language to his knowledge and love of Polish.

In June, 1969, Father Bernacki transferred to the recently formed USA-Western Province and was assigned to assist Fr. Matthew Evanstock with the pre-Novitiate program at Glenwood Springs, Colorado. On weekends, he ministered to the parish of St. Mary in nearby Rifle, Colorado. With the transfer of the Scholasticate to Houston, Father Edward was assigned as assistant pastor at St. Augustine Parish in Isle Breville, Louisiana, followed by St. Edward's in New Iberia. In October, 1975, he served at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Bakersfield, California and in 1977 returned to Isle Breville.

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In March of 1980, Father was assigned as Chaplain at Conway County Hospital in Morrilton, Arkansas, with residence at the local and very historic, Spiritan parish of the Sacred Heart. The hospital was administered by the Benedictine Sisters of St. Scholastica's Monastery in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. In 1987, Father returned to parish ministry in order to assist Fr. Jim Burke, C.S.Sp., at Immaculate Heart of Mary parish in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Three years later, in 1990, he returned to chaplaincy at the Morrilton Hospital. In 1994, the Benedictine Sisters turned over administration of the hospital to a satellite arrangement with the nearby St. Vincent's Infirmary in Little Rock (Sisters of Mercy). January of 1994 marked a significant change for Father Ed. He asked for and was granted permission to retire from active ministry in order to nourish his very strong yearnings for prayer and reflection.

Father Bernacki first moved close to his "old stompin' grounds" at Isle Breville. He lived for one year with the confreres at Maison Brottier, the Spiritan retirement community in Natchitoches, Louisiana. Later that year, in December of 1994, he moved to the retirement community at Casa Laval in Hemet, California, and settled down to his prayer ministry.

Father Edward fully expected to live the rest of his life in Africa, the place of his first missionary assignment. His vocation was motivated by a deep sense of service, generosity and fidelity to his religious vows in our Congregation. He was a very honest and sensitive person who felt strongly the tensions that arose from changes in religious life and ministry over the span of his priestly years. Through everything, Father Edward Bernacki was faithful, observant, and ever devoted to God, his family, the Church and Congregation and, of course, to his beloved "Black and Gold," the Steelers and the Pirates! May he rest in Peace!
