

Fr. Joseph P. LUCEY 84 USA TZA

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The youngest of ten children, he graduated from Schenley High School in 1925 in his hometown and attended Duquesne University and Geneva College for three years while also working in the office of a railroad company. Desirous of becoming a priest, he then entered Cornwells to prepare himself for this vocation.

At the age of 24, he made his profession in Ridgefield on July 25, 1931. His request, however, to be admitted to perpetual vows in 1935 was turned down and he even received formal advise to withdraw from the Congregation. The reasons given were a marked singularity of conduct and a lack of judgment that were not sufficiently offset by his great zeal, industriousness and obvious good will. Joseph, however, accepted his rejection with such humility and eagerness to correct his ways that he was first allowed to renew his vows temporarily and then in January 1937 in perpetuity.

While there remained some lingering doubts about possible complications because of his personal style, his remarkable zeal, sincerity of purpose and great love of the poor gained the day, and on Feb. 2, 1937 he was ordained a priest at Ferndale, the seminary where he had done his senior studies.

Assigned to the Kilimanjaro district in East Africa, he worked there for four years. He is best remembered there for setting up the first wholly indigenous community of African Sisters conducting a hospital clinic on their own (after being trained by the Precious Blood Sisters). He ran into some difficulties with Bp. Joseph Byrne, who was used to strict conformity, worked briefly for the Apostolic Delegate in Mombasa and then in 1941 had to return to the USA for medical attention. Given the war time situation, his

return took place via India and Indonesia to San Francisco on the Dutch steamer Klipfontein.

From 1941-1953 we find him first at Duquesne University, then briefly as an assistant pastor at St. Christopher's, Tiverton, RI, St. Mark's, New York, and St. Augustine's, Isle Brevelle, LA, followed by a three year stint at Duquesne in an administrative capacity.

It was only after this that Father came, so to speak, into his own when he was assigned as pastor to Our Lady of Lourdes parish for African-Americans in Abbeville, LA. He spent ten years there and had a profound impact on the parish. To keep the parochial school open, despite lack of funds or teaching Sisters, he made a successful appeal to five university graduates in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to teach and serve for \$50 a month pocket money: "the lay apostolate is a vivid reality" in Abbeville, headlined the regional Catholic newspaper. The backward little grade school grew to 280 little scholars and acquired a respectable reputation. Father was able to continue the system as long as he stayed in Abbeville.

In 1963 he received a transfer to St. Joseph's, Hartsville, SC. It was a tiny black parish having only 26 African-American parishioners and virtually no chance of development. In stead of advising its closing, Fr. Lucey took up the challenge. Darlington County, the home of Hartsville, had a population of 53,000, and 20% of the people lived in stark poverty. Overcoming the handicap of being a Catholic priest in a solidly Protestant county and of serving the despised blacks, Fr. Lucey started a campaign to provide better living conditions for all the poor of the town, regardless of creed or race.

He became "a thorn in the flesh for many people, due to his zeal and

and persistence" in exposing that poverty to the unwilling eyes of the public at large that refused to believe his vivid descriptions of hunger and want. Slowly, however, he made headway, and was even elected chairman of Hartsville's South Carolina Council on Human Relations. He secured food stamps for the poor and distributed free food to those unable to pay even the modest cost of the stamps. He opened a child development center, funded by the Office of Economic Activity in the former parochial school, and earned a Rural Service Award for "outstanding achievements" in the alleviation of rural poverty and in race relations. All this while his health continued to be precarious.

After 17 years of unremitting labor in Hartsville, Father realized that the time had come for him to give up his beloved work among the poor and in 1980 he gracefully consented to retirement. The City Council of Hartsville passed a resolution expressing its gratitude for the great services to the people rendered by "this man of all seasons."

When his parents died, they had left stock they owned to their children. Joseph was the youngest, and as his brother and eight sisters passed away, they left their shares of stock to him for the Lucey Mission Fund. While living himself in poverty in his own mission, Father Lucey never spent a cent of the Fund's income on his own comfort: all of it went to apostolic and charitable causes.

For 12 years he lived in the Vincentian Home for the chronically ill, but continued to remain active as much as he could, both inside and outside the house. He died there of heart failure. Interment took place in the community plot of St. Mary's, Sharpsburg, cemetery.