

in a

Word™

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Special Issue



Father Raymond Guidry, SVD
1928-2011

IN THIS ISSUE

page 3Obituary of Father Raymond Guidry, SVD an African American priest ordained in 1957.

page 4.....Reflections by Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD on the life of Father Raymond Guidry SVD

pages 5-9Homily delivered by Father Raymond Guidry in 1997 remembering his ordination class.. Homily points to his eloquent style.

page 10photos of Father Raymond Guidry, SVD



“Another legend has gone. Another hero has moved on to claim his eternal reward. Another role model has gone to find his room in that place where there’s plenty good room.”

-Bishop J. Terry Steib, SVD

Father Raymond Guidry, SVD Poet, priest, missionary

by
Ms. Theresa Carson

Fr. Raymond J. Guidry, SVD, who served as a priest on four continents, died at Techny, Ill., on Thursday, June 16, 2011. During his career, Fr. Guidry filled many roles, including missionary, military chaplain, parish priest and poet.

“Ray Guidry had the soul of a poet and the heart of a missionary,” said Very Rev. James Pawlicki, SVD, provincial superior of the Society of the Divine Word U.S. Southern Province. “In a recent email, Bishop Terry Steib wrote that Ray is a legend, hero and role model. He was one of a group of African-American men who joined the Society of the Divine Word in the 1940s. They are a part of history.”

Born in Abbeville, La., on July 30, 1928, young Guidry was the fourth of Erastus and Anita (nee Williams) Guidry’s seven children. At age 21, he professed religious vows with the Society of the Divine Word at Techny. In 1957, he was ordained to the priesthood in Bay St. Louis, Miss.

In his first assignment, he was one of eight African-American Divine Word Missionaries working in the Diocese of Accra, Ghana, West Africa, where he served for nine years.



Fr. Guidry graduated from Army Chaplain School in Fort Hamilton, N.Y. in 1968 before being sent on a tour of duty in Vietnam for a year. During his 20 years as a military chaplain, he rose to the rank of major and also was stationed in West Germany and different parts of the United States.

From 1988 to 1999, he served as a parish priest in Opelousa, La., and later worked as a hospital chaplain at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston from 1999 to 2002.

A poet and short story writer, Fr. Guidry frequently contributed to *Negro Digest*, a popular African-American magazine founded by publishing legend John H. Johnson who later developed *Jet*, *Ebony* and *Essence*.

Fr. Guidry held a master’s degree in religious education from Fordham University, New York City. He had been living at Techny since 2005 when Hurricane Katrina destroyed the residence in Mississippi where he and other Divine Word Missionaries lived. Fr. Guidry is survived by many cousins, nieces and nephews.

The Funeral Mass with military honors took place on Tuesday, June 21, in the Techny Residence Chapel.

Memorial donations for in the name of Fr. Guidry can be made for the care of retired missionaries and may be sent to The Rector, St. Augustine Residence Bay Saint Louis, MS 39520

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF RAY GUIDRY, SVD MISSIONARY/POET LAUREATE

by Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

My thoughts turned to my classmate, Raymond Guidry, who had died on June 16. Gliding past Huntsville, I noticed the body of a beautiful That rotated my thoughts immediately back to Ray Guidry's recent going back to God. Still ungainly teenagers, Ray, Joe Guidry and a score of others had begun our trek to the priesthood in early September of 1943 at the high school St. Augustine Seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. A veritable wilderness of huge pines and swamps back then with the adjacent Bay of St. Louis, the campus was a wonderland for young boys. Pushed by Prefect Father Hubert Posjena and a squad of teachers, we plunged into Latin, French, Greek, the humanities and religious studies. There was a lot of swimming, the alien game of soccer and plenty of baseball in which Ray began to learn shortstop. "I must get to Techny!" I thought as I-45 kept rolling up to greet me. "I must find my way to the big house. I must be there to show how much I appreciate Ray." As the shuttle from Midway neared the famous twin Techny Towers, my mind raced back to early September, 1947 when I first arrived by train from New Orleans to Chicago and was ferried from there to Techny. What a sight that was for a 17-year-old! A city to itself, Techny sported a sizeable church, Holy Spirit Chapel, outsize, multi-winged five-story buildings made of heavy stone, its own water tower with Techny in big block letters, a complete machine shop, a printing press, a spacious apple orchard, a tantalizing bakery and dozens of beehives cared for by Brother Frederick. Awesome also were the endless acres of farmland covered with wheat, rye, cattle for our sustenance, and seasonal things like peonies that were sold to keep us solvent. It was likewise our first look at the wonder of a vineyard loaded with succulent grapes. Likewise, we folks from the small deep-South towns of Abbeville and Lake Charles, Louisiana had never been associated with a group comprised of American boys from roots as varied as German, Italian, Lithuanian, Czech, Polish, Irish and sundry. We soon ran into the likes of George Heffner and August Langenkamp who joined us in Bay St. Louis in 1951, and Armand Francis Xavier Theriault who went to Bay St. Louis with his classmates Ed Bauer, Jack Sheerin and Bernard Keller in 1950. Perhaps most astounding of all was the size of our combined novitiate classes. Yes, there were two years of novitiate in those days, and every year there was always a combination of first-year novices and second-year novices. Together, we totaled 92 novices, a total that actually stood a little higher before it settled down at 92.

In these times of plunging numbers of priests and brothers, scrambling vocation recruiters can only marvel at those numbers of yesteryear. And what a glorious novitiate we had with the one-and-only Father Felix Glorious who, true to his military background in Germany, ran our spiritual training ground like an austere two-year-long boot camp! Graced with equanimity and patience, Ray flourished amid such hardship much better than most of us. After our novitiate ordeal, we journeyed to our SVD college among the rolling hills of Epworth, a small town about 13 miles from Dubuque, Iowa where we did our first two years of college. We continued baseball, of course. Back to St. Augustine Major Seminary in Bay St. Louis in 1951, we delved into the challenges of philosophy, geology and Hebrew for two years, then moved on to four years of theology. All the while, we were into swimming, boating, fishing and baseball. As unassuming as ever, Ray had become a slick-fielding, accomplished shortstop. Our ordination to the priesthood on May 11, 1957 marked a moment of decision for Ray when he decided to do a missionary stint in Ghana. After ten years, his attention turned toward his oldest sister Helen who was having serious economic issues. With a plan to help her, he requested that the Society of the Divine Word allow him to enlist. Coming in just under the 40-year cutoff age, Ray enlisted in the army where he served as chaplain for 16 years, including a stay in Vietnam, eventually retiring as Major. Thus, he was able to work for the salvation of souls and help his sister at the same time. He helped Helen until her death and later his younger sister Orelia and her children. Ray made a retreat at the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky where former SVD Father Matthew Kelty advised him to spice his sermons with poetry. Ray followed his advice as associate at Holy Ghost Parish in Opelousas, Louisiana for eight years, as hospital chaplain in Galveston for six years, and on into retirement. That advice stirred up what was already there, motivating him to express in poems the poetry of the Good News that he saw in every person and creature of the universe. Always soft-spoken and sensitive, Ray blended well with any group of confreres or other folks, ever congenial, readily flashing his ivories, never criticizing or speaking ill or negatively of others, and never allowing himself to get into loud arguments. I, for one, join the chorus of those who apply to Ray a comment we reserve for those special people who enter and frequent the personal, intimate space of our life, "Ray, you were a gift to your family, to me and many others. Thank God for you!" Provincial Superior Jim Pawlicki, who gave a stirring homily/eulogy at Ray's funeral, received this great summary of Ray from Memphis Bishop Terry Steib, S.V.D., "Another legend has gone. Another hero has moved on to claim his eternal reward. Another role model has gone to find his room in that place where there's plenty good room."

Let me share a medley of thoughts. And because it is the feast of St. Patrick let us begin with an Irish blessing: "May the roof of your house not fall in, and may those in not fall out." Once upon a time a hen and a pig were making a journey together. After a time they became hungry. They began looking for a restaurant. Finally they came to one that had a sign out front: "Ham and eggs our specialty." The hen wanted to go in, but the pig hesitated. The hen became upset and carried on in chicken chatter. After wrangling and haggling, the pig said: "It's easy enough for you to say: "lets go in, all they expect from you is a contribution, from me they will expect total commitment." As Divine Word missionaries we have striven to give total commitment as Ambassadors of Heaven and Keepers of the Eucharist.

Charles Dickens' novel on the French Revolution "A Tale of Two Cities" played out between the city of Paris and the city of London begins in this wise: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."

Here is mirrored the human condition as we live out our lives between the city of God and the city of man. Like Moses, we Divine Word Missionaries stand in the breach between the epoch of belief and the epoch of incredulity; between the season of Light and the season of Darkness; between the spring of hope and the winter of despair and as Ambassadors bring the Good News of salvation which is incarnate in the Person, words and deeds of Jesus Christ: God loved the world so much, He gave His only Son, and the Son loved us so much, He would rather die than live without us, and so as St. Augustine says "He came to pay a debt He did not owe, because we owed

homily preached on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the class of 1957 on the Feast of St. Patrick March 17th at Bay St. Louis, Ms.

Raymond J. Quinlan

a debt we could not pay." In this breach we are inundated by a plethora of tormenting questions." What is the purpose of life? Where did we come from? Where are we going? How are we to get there? Why is there suffering? And in the process of trying to answer these questions we keep reminding ourselves and the people that there is talk of another world where tears have been wiped from every eye and there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain for those things have passed away. And there we shall have answers to all our whys. Emily Dickinson writes: "I shall know why when Time is over and I have ceased to wonder why Christ will explain each separate anguish in the fair school room of the sky, And I, for wonder at His woe, shall forget the drop of anguish that scalds me now, that scalds me now."

Father Jack Shea writes: "you and I never saw the Christ, never witnessed a miracle, never enjoyed His presence, never heard Him give a sermon, never touched Him. But some others did and they told their friends, who passed it on to other friends, who shared it with their children generation after generation until, thank God, someone told us." Now we go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere, the story of Jesus.

In the conclusion of Shakespeare's Hamlet, Hamlet says to his friend: "If you hold me in your heart Horatio absent yourself from felicity a while and in this harsh world draw your breath in pain to tell my story."

Christ says to us: "If you truly love me, roll up your sleeves and whatever it takes in this harsh world, tell my story. And what a story! There has never been anyone like Him. He is something else. And the beauty, the fire, the truth that break forth from Him is a billion times more lovely, more dangerous than anything the world has ever seen. He hit this world with such an impact as to split it in two: Before Christ and After Christ.

You remember that in the late thirties and early forties the world was virtually in the hands of a few men, Stalin, Tito, Roosevelt, Churchill, Hitler, Mussolini. If we were to take the first letter of the name of each one of these men, C for Churchill, H for Hitler, R for Roosevelt, I for Il Duce Mussolini, S for Stalin, T for Tito we have the beautiful name of CHRIST. Where are these men today? Some were famous, some were in famous, but all were transient, all succumbed to that implacable foe we call death; all save one who rose triumphantly from the grave.

And the Christ, what power does He hold in His hands? Only the wounds of love. "And I if I be lifted up will draw all things to myself."

He is a many-splendored thing. He is homeless until we have a home. He is sad until we make Him the center of our joy. He is restless until we rest in Him. He is that tremendous Lover, the Hound of Heaven, as Francis Thompson describes Him, who comes after us on strong patient feet: "Deliberate speed, majestic instancy, they beat and a voice beat more instant than the feet, all things betray thee who betrayest me. Naught shelters thee who wilt not shelter me. Naught contents thee who contents not me. Rise, clap my hand, and come."

That Tremendous Lover is passionate and compassionate. Ask the woman of Samaria. She came to the well thirsting physically and spiritually. She shared her story with a stranger who shared his with her. After the searching, healing dialogue she ran breathlessly back to the town saying: "I met a man at the well. He knows everything about me and still thinks I'm worthwhile."

Ask the disciples on the road to Emmaus. After the crucifixion Christ walked into their night of doubt, disappointment, despair. When He came, there was no light. But when He left there was no darkness.

He had set them ablaze. For as they themselves said: "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when He talked to us on the road and explained the scripture to us? The Christ Himself said: "I have come to set fire to the earth and how I wish it were blazing! (Lk. 12, 49)

On the morning of St. Valentine two farmers met in 1809 across the line from Illinois. They stopped their mules and voiced their joy. One farmer lived near the city, the other in the hinterland. The one near the city was pregnant with the latest news: James Madison being sworn in as the fourth President of the United States; young Napoleon Bonaparte reshaping Europe as if it were a ball of wax. After sharing national and international news, he said to his friend from the backwoods: "Now tell me what's happening down your way?" "Oh, nothing happens down this way," he slowly answered. "The fact is, just the other day my wife, Sally said: "Nothing happens down this way." Then, as an after thought, he said: "The Lincolns live down the road a mile or two in a small log cabin. Folks say they have a little babe. I understand they call him Abe. But nothing happens down this way.

With hindsight that little babe, Abe (Abraham Lincoln) had more impact on our lives than James Madison or Napoleon Bonaparte.

Each day we approach the altar: to human eyes "nothing happens down this way, "but to the eyes of faith! Ahhh. Let St. Thomas Aquinas tell us:

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more,
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.

Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived;
How says trusty hearing? that shall be believed;
What God's Son has told me, take for true I do;
Truth speaks truly or there's nothing true.

I am not like Thomas, wounds I cannot see,
But can truly call thee God and Lord as he;
This faith each day deeper be my holding of,
Daily make me firmer hope and dearer love.

Jesus, whom I look at shrouded here below,
I beseech thee send me what I thirst for so,
Some day to gaze on thee face to face in light,
And be blest for ever with thy glory's sight

(St. Thomas Aquinas—translated by Gerard Manley Hopkins)

And Christ's ringing promise is: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my
blood will have life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day."

God who's got the whole world in His hands is stabled in our hands. We
hold Him up who holds us up. Nothing happens down this way? On the contrary
we experience a world of miracles down this way. Hush! Be still! He who
listens hears eternity there.

We Divine Word Missionaries—Ambassadors of Heaven and Keepers of the
Eucharist must continually cry out to a doubt-ridden, materialistic world—

Look at the stars
Look up at the skies
Look at yourselves so wonderfully made

and praise the God who brought us
here from nowhere by his omnipotence
and love. Yes give glory to God who
(as James Weldon Johnson says so
powerfully) stepped out on space
looked around and said
I'm lonely
I'll make me a world, etc.
etc, etc.

Amen, Amen

Let the Church Sing

Amen.



1997 Jubilarians



Raymond Guidry at Jubilee celebration March 1997

To Raymond Guidry

