

# True Servant



NATIONAL SHRINE of ST. JOHN NEUMANN Fall 2007 • Volume 7 • Number 4

## “...This Little Man That Nobody Noticed...”

*(The following is taken from an article written for the October 13, 1963 issue of Ave Maria magazine, the actual day of our Saint's beatification. We excerpt this article for our Fall 2007 Newsletter. Rev. Donald Miniscalco, C.S.S.R., presently a member of the Redemptorist preaching ministry, in residence here at St. Peter's, is the author.)*

“As Pope Pius XII declared in 1958: ‘Among the shepherds of the flock, the future of venerable John Neumann of Philadelphia stands pre-eminent. It was chiefly through his efforts that a Catholic school system came into being, and that parish schools began rising all across America.’

There remains, however, one important question about Bishop Neumann, the one Archbishop Ireland asked in 1885, that the devil's advocate posed in 1912. It puzzles many Catholics today. Does the Church, they ask, beatify a man because he was a farsighted planner, a good organizer? Does a successful building program merit the honors of the altar? Does it gain a person the title of Blessed? Surely, there must be something more. But what?

Alongside the hundreds of other causes before the Congregation of Rites, John Neumann presents very little of the extraordinary. He was not a mystic, this short, squat rather prosaic-looking priest with his large round head and deep-set eyes. He was no miracle-worker. He was not known for ecstatic apparitions. Even his prayers were hardly

more than the standard of Catholic devotion.

John Neumann was hardly the sort you would take a second look at, as he trekked his daily rounds on the Niagara frontier and hurried along Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh on the business of building St. Philomena's Church, Philadelphia ladies in crinoline hoopskirt, gentlemen in broadcloth with high beaver hats noticed nothing unusual in the little man in black, hurrying up Girard Avenue to St. Peter's to make his monthly retreat with his confreres. To them, he was just a good, conscientious religious.

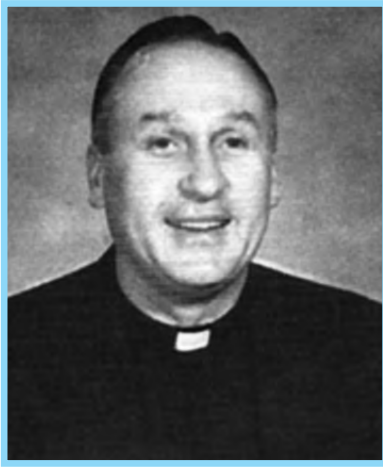
Yet, for all that is ordinary about John Neumann, there is something that is special, lurking in the very humdrum of his life, something that the Church spotlights in proclaiming him Blessed. Throughout his life, this little man nobody noticed was continually choosing things that were less comfortable, that would take him out of his way, that would cost more of his time and energy. Bluntly, he was forever doing things the hard way.

Not that John Neumann was given to morbid-self repression, to enjoyment of doing what others found difficult. Rather, he chose the hard way of self-denial and sacrifice as his expression of love. He was a man in love with God

and the souls God had entrusted to him. John Neumann chose to follow Christ, his Lover, in the way the Lord himself suggested: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”



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## Dear Friends of St. John Neumann,

Christian disciples. "In receiving indulgences, we should not think that we have earned them. Our efforts express our openness to receiving God's mercy. As a result, we grow closer to Jesus and so are able to reap the benefit of His salvation."

A *Plenary Indulgence* may be obtained by the faithful of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia who are properly disposed and fulfill the three abovementioned conditions, while at the same time participating in any of the following events during the year-long observance of the Bicentennial of the establishment of the Diocese:

- **Bicentennial celebrations are taking place in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul or in some sacred place within the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia presided over the Cardinal Archbishop or his designed.**
- **A pilgrimage to the Cathedral**

**Basilica, the Shrine of St. John Neumann, or the Shrine of St. Katherine Drexel, which includes a solemn communal celebration.**

- **A Plenary Indulgence may also be obtained by individuals or groups who, fulfilling the three abovementioned conditions, make a pious visit to the Cathedral Basilica, the Shrine of St. John Neumann, or the Shrine of St. Katherine Drexel, where they spend time in quiet prayer and conclude with the Lord's Prayer.**

- **The closing mass of the Bicentennial Year to be held at Villanova Pavilion on April 13, 2008.**

I wish to draw your attention to other announcements in this newsletter regarding the celebration of our Feast Day of St. John Neumann on January 5th and 6th of 2008. We hope you can join us for these special times of grace.

*In Jesus and Mary,  
Fr. Kevin Moley, C.S.S.R.*

**A**nother blessing in Philadelphia! Philadelphia's blessings continue during this bicentennial year of the Archdiocese. A *Plenary Indulgence* is granted by participating in any event, pilgrimage, or visit under these conditions: **one must go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, and pray for the intentions of the Holy Father, either on the day of the event or within several days before or after it.**

The Church's longstanding tradition of granting and obtaining indulgences inspires within us a spirit of reparation for our sins and a desire to live more virtuously as

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### *Come to the Feast!*

On Saturday, January 5, 2008, at 12:15 PM, we will celebrate the Feast Day of St. John Neumann, with Cardinal Justin Rigali as celebrant and homilist of the Mass. This liturgy will take place in the Shrine Church.

If you cannot make the Saturday celebration, there will be another celebration in our grand Upper Church on Sunday, January 6th at 3:30 PM, with Rev. Alfred Bradley, C.S.S.R., Vicar Superior Redemptorists, as the main celebrant and homilist.

At this mass, the Archdiocesan Boy Choir will sing at 3:00 PM before the mass.

## *true* Servant

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# Favors Received

It was nice to have met you last week which prompted me to tell the story of my uncle's healing all over again. It is a tale that never grows old.

Back in the 1970's, my great-uncle was diagnosed with cancer. I was extremely close to Uncle Smith, as he and his wife were as parents to me from the time I was eight years old. My uncle's plight was very much mine and I turned to St. John Neumann for help.

Why did I turn to St. John Neumann in particular? Well, he was right in my own backyard for one thing – almost family, being a Philadelphian like myself! But apart from our "stomping grounds" connection, John Neumann was front and center in my mind then because of all the saint-hood talk that was swirling around him during this period.

At any rate, I remember having prayed at the Neumann Shrine at 5th and Girard and having approached this holy man a great deal more when I was in Italy in 1977. It just so happened that I was studying art history in Rome when the canonization of St. John Neumann was still fresh and very much in the air. Medals of the new saint could be found on almost every corner around the Vatican. I bought one and took it home to my uncle, and from then on, he carried the medal in his wallet.

Uncle Smith had quite a stretch of earthly time yet for devoting himself to his new friend, St. John Neumann. My dear guardian from childhood was cured of his cancer.



His body had been made clean and I never doubted that it was due to the prayers that I had placed before the Philadelphia bishop-turned saint. When my uncle finally left us in 1992, he was around 86 and simply died from complications of old age.

I have thought many times of the wonderful gift that St. John Neumann obtained from God for not only my uncle but for all of us who loved him and needed him. Uncle Smith had a good life with his family for at least 15 more years. St. John Neumann gave my family an extended stretch of time for more conversation, more hugs, more laughter; many more precious memories...I am, and will be very grateful for indeed.

– Shirley

**If you have any stories or experiences in which you have felt the touch of God through the intercession of St. John Neumann, please let us know. This is a beautiful way of witnessing to your faith.**

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## “...This Little Man That Nobody Noticed...”

*Continued from page 1*

John Neumann was not long in the New World before he learned what it meant to “take up one’s cross.” There was the loneliness of this strange new land, the loneliness of an ordination day with no hometown friends to share his joy, no parents to lay his anointed hands in blessing.

In the Spring of 1837, Father Neumann saw his first Yankee peddler, the indefatigable itinerant merchant who trudged the roads from cabin to cabin, shouldering his pack of needles and potions, cloth, kettles and clocks. That same Spring Father Neumann walked from cabin to cabin on his parish rounds, walked when he might have used a horse and car. He had discovered that something extra—shoe leather—to draw down God’s blessings on the homes he visited on the Niagra frontier.

Neumann’s “hard way” took varied forms at different times. In Pittsburgh for example, where

he was Superior of the community, he would rise before the rest and tiptoe down to light the stove, so that the rectory would be warmer for the confreres at morning prayer. In Baltimore, Neumann’s “hard way” meant taking the night calls, all of them.

Two days after his arrival in Philadelphia, the new Bishop slipped out of his residence on Logan Square and hurried down to Moyamensing to the penitentiary. Two young Poles, the Skrupinski brothers, were awaiting the hangman’s noose for the murder of a boy. Bishop Neumann spent most of the morning in the cell with them to prepare their souls for eternity.

John Neumann once wrote in his diary: “Whenever the opportunity offers, I shall offer my services to my fellow men. Whenever I meet someone, I shall treat him as if he were the Lord himself.”

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**“...This Little Man That Nobody Noticed...”**

*Continued from page 1*

The following prayer is recorded in his diary: ‘My Lord, I offer you the forget-me-not of fidelity, the lily of purity, the rose of pure love; but to them, let me add the violet of humility, Sweet Child of Bethlehem...for you, and only you, I will live.’

‘His holy life’, the Pontiff told America, ‘his childlike gentleness, his hard labor and his tremendous foresight, are still fresh and green among you.’ And the Holy Father might well have added that the secret of Blessed John Neumann’s holiness is ours for the taking; that *little extra* out of love.”

We thank Ave Maria Press who allowed us to use portions of the above article to continue our mission of making known the life and virtue of our Saint. Among the saints of our tradition, St. John Neumann is indeed very accessible to all of us and that is why so many come to visit our Shrine here each year. So, today, and tomorrow, do a *little extra* out of love!



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