

Matthew Deffains, O. Carm.
1905-1999

Obituary

If there is a quintessential Carmelite of the PCM Province who exemplified the best of our ideals, spirit and tradition, Matthew Deffains would have to be highly considered for the honor.

Not only was he a deeply spiritual Carmelite, and a more diligent worker, he was also a loving and kind person who was never known to speak ill of a fellow Carmelite or any other person. He lived charity each day of his life in imitation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. To a great extent, this was the focus of his life in Carmel.

His work on the farm at Mount Carmel College in Niagara Falls, Ontario, where he labored for almost 25 years, could be considered by many as little less than Heracleian. In addition, he raised a pedigree herd of cattle that won numerous prizes for milk production and breeding.

Matthew was born on the Isle of Jersey in the English Channel, part of the United Kingdom (England). He was the son of the late Joseph and Anne Marie (Herve) Deffains. He grew up on a farm with a family of five brothers and two sisters: Joseph, Peter, Remy, Walter, Cyril, Adelaine and Anna. They were devout Catholics, and the family traced its origins to Brittany in France. He attended St. Matthew's Catholic School in Jersey from the age of six until he was fourteen. This was the extent of the education granted to students of French descent but provided him with an excellent fundamental knowledge which stood him in good stead all his life.

When a younger brother, Walter, decided to emigrate to Canada in 1929, Matthew followed soon after and found work on a fruit farm in the Niagara area. A devout Catholic from childhood, he felt a calling to the religious life. After speaking to the late Fr. Fidelis Paulding, then pastor of the Carmelite parish of St. Patrick's in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Matthew entered the Carmelite Order at Mt. Carmel College there in June 1931.

He later professed his simple vows there on 15 August 1933, and then his solemn vows on 15 August 1936. He would remain at Niagara caring for the farm until 1959 when he was transferred to Carmel Retreat in Mahwah, New Jersey, and then to Mt. Carmel Priory in Houston, Texas, from 1969-97. He then retired to Carmelite Carefree Village in Darien, Illinois in June of 1997, until he went to the Brothers of Mercy Home in Clarence, New York, to be closer to his brother, Cyril, and his family, in February of 1999.

The personal story of Matthew's life was related by himself several years ago at Mt. Carmel Priory in Houston, Texas. The story was on audio tape, and through the good efforts of Fr. John Hertel the story was transferred to a word processor. The original tape was made during the Christmas season of 1992-93, and edited slightly by Fr. Kevin Shanley. It was then printed in the *SWORD*, Volume 58, Numbers 1 and 2, November 1998, pp. 14-22. Matthew's story reveals his deep faith and his life-long devotion to Carmel.

The final year of Matthew's life was spent in the great and kind care of the Brothers of Mercy of Clarence, New York. The place was selected not only for its excellent medical and spiritual care, which Matthew increasingly needed, but also because it was near to Mary Theresa Sirianni, his niece and her family, and also to his brother, Cyril, and sister-in-law, Winnie, in Niagara Falls, Ontario. It also afforded the Carmelite Community at Mt. Carmel Spiritual Centre not only to visit Matthew, but also to invite him to visit the place where he had first entered the Order in 1931. Matthew did visit Niagara for a final time, and was shown great hospitality by Fr. Malachy Smith, Fr. Frederick Tillotson and the other members of the community. They also visited him in Clarence, New York. A photo sent by Mary Theresa shows Matthew happily posing with Frs. Jordan Rooney, Frederick Tillotson, Malachy Smith, Bruce Baker and Br. Gabriel Murray on a visit in February 1999. He missed his Carmelite Community.

"The Little Flower Shrine is at Niagara," wrote Mary Theresa in November of this year (1999), "Winnie, Cyril, Matt and I spent a beautiful Spring afternoon there. This past weekend when her relics were at the Spiritual Centre I prayed that she would take care of our 'Matt' as he nears the end of his journey."

The end came peacefully for Matthew on Sunday, 21 November 1999, in Clarence, New York. According to his wishes, and those of his family, the remains of Matthew were transported to Mt. Carmel in Niagara Falls, Ontario. A Wake Service was held in the chapel of Mt. Carmel on Friday, 26 November, from 7:00 - 9:30 PM. A Mass of Christian Burial was held in the chapel the following morning at 11:00 AM. Fr. John Welch, Eastern commissary provincial, presided at the concelebrated Mass. Fr. Jordan Rooney, pastor of Our Lady of Peace Church, was the homilist. Burial was in Our Lady of Peace Cemetery at Niagara.

Thus was Matthew, one of the most faithful and exemplary Carmelites of the PCM Province, laid to rest near where he joined the Carmelites almost 70 years ago.

May his memory and example continue to inspire. When asked to describe his almost life-long friend, Matthew, Fr. Kieran O'Hara said, "Just one word: Charity."

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