

REV. FERDINAND VAN DER STAAY, O. CARM.  
(1861-1940)

By the REV. ANTHONY C. DRESSEL, O. Carm.  
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ON EASTER Sunday night, March 24, 1940, Father Ferdinand Van der Staay died peacefully in St. Mary's Hospital, Emporia, Kansas, after an illness of almost four years. He had anticipated his death for from the beginning of Lent he had said that he would not live beyond Easter. He was the oldest priest in the American Province in point of years. He was born in Weston, Missouri, August 30, 1861, the son of Frank Van der Staay and Elizabeth Eskens. He was baptized in Holy Trinity Church,

Weston, September 8, 1861. His father was an early settler in that quaint and busy tobacco district. As a young man of eighteen he entered St. Boniface Carmelite Priory at Scipio, Kansas, as a postulant. He entered the Novitiate there on July 20, 1880, and was professed a year later. He was ordained at Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, April 22, 1888.

Immediately after ordination he was assigned to Holy Trinity Church in Pittsburgh, Pa., then in charge of the Most Reverend Pius Mayer. There he became the second director of the Third Order of Mount Carmel Secular. From 1894 to 1900 he assisted in Englewood, New Jersey, helping out in neighboring parishes. In 1900 he became pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Leavenworth, Kansas, where he stayed until 1903. He was made Prior of St. John's monastery, New Baltimore, Pa., which was the temporary Novitiate. In 1906 he returned to Leavenworth where he was reappointed pastor. In 1909 he was transferred to Scipio where he remained until 1914, when he went to Pittsburgh. He was sent to Englewood in 1915 to take care of the mission at Closter, New Jersey, where he built the little St. Mary's Church, assisted by Mr. Patrick Gratten of Englewood. The little church was later fondly called "The Gem of the Valley."

From 1924 until the time of his death he was attached to Scipio Priory. In 1936 he contracted a diabetic condition which confined him to bed. However, in spite of his sad condition he lived to see his Golden Jubilee which he celebrated in St. Mary's Hospital, Emporia, Kansas, in 1938. Unable to say Mass, he assisted at the Mass sung by Father Matthew, the Provincial, receiving Holy Communion.

During his stay in Pittsburgh Father Ferdinand became an intimate friend of the late Rt. Rev. Monsignor Suehr, Vicar General of the diocese and also a close friend of several other priests, particularly Father Frank Hertzog of New Kensington and Father James Werz of Beaver Falls, Pa. Father Ferdinand and our late Father Otto Wiedeman had for a number of years taken charge of St. Mary's parish in Beaver Falls, living in a couple of small rooms over the drugstore on the main street.

While in Pittsburgh Father Ferdinand contracted a nervous disorder which, while it did not incapacitate him, made him very wretched at times. His manner had always been gruff and brusque, and his nervous affliction tended to increase his gruff manner. Those, however, who dwelt with him soon learned that his gruffness hid a very sympathetic and charitable nature. Children also discovered that "his bark was worse than his bite" and flocked to him. Indeed many of his parishioners learned in time of need and necessity the real gentleness, charity and kindness with which he could make their troubles his own. The troubles of his parishioners were Father Ferdinand's troubles also. Father Ferdinand was chaplain in Pittsburgh at the Rosalia Hospital and

at the Eudes Institute for Girls. He was very fond of children. He once spent the Fourth of July at the Eudes Institute. When they began to set off the fireworks, Father Ferdinand was right in the midst of the children, setting off the biggest crackers and enjoying things immensely.

In his long illness he proved to be a real friar. For four long years he accepted his cross cheerfully and prayerfully, showing no signs of quick temper or impatience. He asked for nothing except to meet his God in the spirit of faith and surrender. Indeed he was one of those staunch soldiers who bear pain and reverses silently. For the better part of his life he was deprived of the sight of one eye. This must have taxed him and his nerves terribly. Through all his sufferings he kept that sense of humor which relieved many a tense situation and turned many a frown into a hearty laugh.

The high regard in which he was held was shown by the attendance at his funeral held in St. Boniface Church, Scipio, Kansas, March 28. The Rt. Rev. Paul C. Schulte, Bishop of Leavenworth, sang the Solemn Pontifical Requiem and also gave the absolution at the grave. Father Provincial preached the sermon and paid an eloquent tribute to Father Ferdinand. Father Isidore Smith, O.S.B., a nephew, was archpriest; Father Mark Merwich, O.S.B., another relative, and Father Leo Klasinski, were deacons of honor. Father Urban Lager and Father Frank Krause were deacon and subdeacon of the Mass and the Rev. A. D. Stimas was master of ceremonies. Besides a numerous secular clergy, the following Carmelites also were present:

Fathers Philip Irwin, Ralph McPartland, Telesphorus Becher, Ambrose Casey and Bonaventure Gilmore. Burial took place in the Carmelite plot of St. Boniface Cemetery.

Father Ferdinand's passing opens a fond memory for those who knew him well. He gained his goal in true Carmelite fashion: *per aspera ad astra*. The splendid resignation he showed during his long illness showed also the deep piety which he hid so well under a seemingly brusque manner. What he could not conceal, however, was his devotion to our Lord, especially in His sacred Passion, and our Blessed Mother. In his passing on Easter Sunday, March 24, 1940, our Province lost a good Carmelite priest and a devoted servant of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.