

The Patron Saint of Failures and Other Humble Folk

Something to Think About

Solanus Casey (1870-1957) could easily be the definition that appears in the dictionary after the word, "humble" or maybe ... even "failure." He was a priest, but by contemporary standards his priestly vocation was a failure. He performed the same menial work day after day for forty years. But we're getting ahead of our story.

Casey witnessed a tragedy in 1891 that changed his life. He was not quite twenty-one, ambitious and hardworking. He had been a lumberjack, brick maker, prison guard, streetcar conductor. One afternoon, his streetcar rounded a corner and his life changed. He brought the streetcar to a screeching halt, narrowly missing a crowd of people. Casey wasn't prepared for the bloody scene he found. A drunken sailor stood cursing over a young woman he had just raped and stabbed repeatedly. The crowd was in a rage. The image was branded into his mind forever. He prayed daily for the girl, the sailor, the people in the crowd. That very year he entered the seminary in Wisconsin.

Casey wasn't much of a student. He needed to know both Latin and German to get by in the seminary and he knew neither. Eventually he was told to leave the seminary. He joined the Capuchin order in Detroit and spent seven years studying at the Capuchin seminary in Wisconsin. Once more German and Latin threatened him. His seminary professors opposed ordaining him. Finally, they agreed, but they limited his ministry. He would not be allowed to administer penance or preach formally. He wouldn't even be allowed to wear the Capuchin hood.

For fifty-three years Father Solanus would never hear a confession or conduct a retreat. He spent forty of those years answering the door of the monastery. Others would have complained; he did not. But this simple service launched a remarkable career as a spiritual director, friend, and miracle-worker. People reported amazing healings. The world rushed to the door of the monastery, eager for the prayers and love of Father Solanus.

The one considered not very smart and hardly worthwhile was used by God to touch literally thousands of lives. Others in Solanus's situation would have considered themselves outcasts and grown bitter.

But Solanus Casey opened the door to the hungry at his doorstep. He didn't bother with thinking about what anyone else thought of him. He modestly and peacefully opened his heart, and his arms to life, just exactly as God had given it to him. He trusted.