

▲ Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio



Put Out Into the Deep

Promoting a Saint from Brooklyn

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

The Saints are our friends and intercessors. The Feast of All Saints gives us an opportunity to recognize all those saintly people who have gone before us and who may not yet been canonized. I dedicate this article to the memory of Msgr. Bernard Quinn, whom I have come to know as a special intercessor and friend to me.

Perhaps the bond of relationship begins with the fact that he was born in Newark, N.J., just as I was. Msgr. Quinn was born in 1888 and moved with his family to Brooklyn, where he was later ordained a priest for the diocese in 1912. His dedication to the African-American community of our diocese has been well documented in a book by Msgr. Paul W. Jervis entitled, "Quintessential Priest — The Life of Father Bernard J. Quinn." The book is available from Msgr. Jervis who is the Postulator of the Cause we are initiating in the diocese.

Yes, we want to have our very own saint in Brooklyn and I can think of no one more deserving than he. But allow me to account my particular connection to Msgr. Quinn. As you know, I had quadruple bypass surgery this past June on my 65th birthday. Unfortunately, I was readmitted to the hospital because of a nose hemorrhage about one week after I was released following my surgery. Unbeknownst to me, I had developed two blood clots in my lungs and one in my heart. On the Sunday morning when I was readmitted to the hospital I knew I was ill because I had fainted.

For some reason while in the emergency room, the memory of Msgr. Quinn came to me and I prayed to him. In a certain sense, I made a promise to him. I promised that I would do all that I could to see him canonized a saint if he would help me through this medical emergency. It was either miraculous or due to the doctor's quick intervention that the next day my doctor told me that the clot in my heart had disappeared. In the next days, I was informed that the two clots in my lungs were gone as well. Certainly, this may not qualify as a first-class miracle since the help of blood thinners and a Greenfield inferior vena cava filter may also have made a difference. However, I personally

attribute my good health to the intercession of Msgr. Quinn.

The story of his life is more than interesting. As Msgr. Jervis entitled his book, "Quintessential Priest," Msgr. Quinn was a priest in all senses of the term. He worked tirelessly for those who had few to minister to and defend them. Unfortunately, even the Church of our own diocese in some quarters was not very supportive of his efforts to evangelize and care for the African-American people in our own midst. He overcame one obstacle after another, so much so that he became truly a leader for the Diocese of Brooklyn to be remembered for time in memoriam.

St. Peter Claver Church for black Catholics of the Diocese of Brooklyn was dedicated by Archbishop Thomas Molloy in 1922. In the same year, Msgr. Quinn wrote a pastoral letter to his parishioners by whom he pledged to give them his life's blood to its very last drop, and, indeed, he did. He invited religious communities to come to work with him in the ministry to the black Catholics and began a novena at St. Peter Claver's Church to the Little Flower, St. Thérèse Martin, who had been canonized in 1925. The overwhelming attendance at the novena in 1930 was estimated at more than 10,000 people each week. Unfortunately, this earned for him the envy of some of the neighboring parishes since it was the white Catholics who were attending for the most part. Msgr. Quinn, however, was undaunted and continued the novena which proved to be not only a spiritual source for the people, but also a source of income for establishing another black parish in Queens, St. Benedict the Moor, and also for a summer-day camp in Wading River, L.I.

The testimony which has already been given by the elderly parishioners of St. Peter Claver who personally knew Msgr. Quinn attests to his particular sanctity and zeal. Also, his writings and sermons have been preserved, and they give an insight into this special man of faith who died in 1940 at the age of 52. His funeral was an event chronicled by the Brooklyn Daily Eagle and The Tablet, with an

extraordinary outpouring of grief and support for this saintly man.

The diocesan process of presenting an appeal to the Holy See for the various stages of the canonization process demands time and effort, as well as funding for the somewhat complex gathering of information necessary to present the cause to the Holy See. We are fortunate to have Msgr. Robert Sarno, a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, who works for the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints in Rome and who has been able to give us clear guidance as to the steps which we have to take in this process.

Msgr. Jervis, the Postulator, needs assistance in various ways. First, he must gather the information necessary for this process and he must raise the appropriate funding. A Guild is being established under the direction of Msgr. Jervis and will be authorized to collect funds to assist in the canonization process for Msgr. Quinn.

As I began to learn about Msgr. Quinn, one day I asked Msgr. Jervis what was so extraordinary about the sanctity of this man. Msgr. Jervis answered with great conviction, "Everything about Msgr. Quinn was extraordinary, especially his holiness." I know that we have chosen the correct Postulator for the Cause since he is so convinced of the merits of the life of this saintly man.

As we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, please join me in praying that one of our own priests will someday be canonized a saint and that we all live long enough to be its witnesses.

Msgr. Quinn put out into the deep waters of trying to minister to our African-American Catholics at a time when racial equality was not universally accepted. His efforts have proved fruitful over the years. As we look to the vast number of African-American Catholics in Brooklyn and Queens, either native-born or coming from other countries, we recognize that the intercession of Msgr. Quinn is still needed, and, as I will testify, effective. Please join me in praying to all the saints we have known. In particular, let us pray for the process that we have begun for Msgr. Quinn.