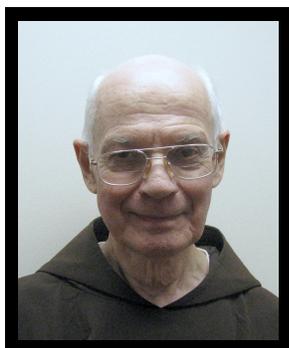


Neerology

John Guimond
1930 - 2013



When John Guimond retired he gave me a phone call asking if it would be possible for him to come to Huntington and live in a parish setting. I was alone at the time, needing help quite badly, so I eagerly said “yes” even though he was coming in “retirement.” I felt he might be able to help me with the parish Masses and a few other things. I had never met John before, had no idea who he was or anything about his past. I had seen his name on a little book on scripture sometime before and that was about all I knew of him.

He came to SS. Peter and Paul and lived and served here for the next eight years. After he left here and “retired” once again at Capuchin Retreat in Washington, Michigan, I knew absolutely no more about him than when he first came eight years earlier. John simply never talked, or at least very little, and when he did talk he certainly never spoke about himself. I have never lived with someone like John. In some ways it was a frustration because my expectations of community life were never fulfilled, and yet I loved him very much and was very grateful for him being here. My health was failing and often times I had a hard time carrying out my duties as pastor. But John was always most willing to do anything I might ask or suggest. He simply never complained or said he couldn’t or wouldn’t do something. At the time I was giving many weekend retreats in Cincinnati and traveling in Europe and John gave me the freedom to be away for the weekend and he would cover all the Masses, confessions, etc. He was simply a “God-send.”

People in Huntington got used to seeing John walking past their homes. He walked every day through the downtown and then in the neighborhoods. He was very active with the Widows of Prayer, a group of women he helped organize while at Monte Alverno, along with Mary Reardon. This group of women grew quite rapidly here in the parish and in the Fort Wayne area and are still active today, spending hours a day praying for priests and vocations.

John was born the youngest of six children, in Canada. He really was “French to the core,” with French being his native language. His early years were between Canada and Detroit. He was a young man deeply influenced by religion and church right from the start. Thoughts of a life in religion began in him from an early age and probably never left him, going back and forth between the priesthood, diaconate and religious life in which he eventually spent many years as a Capuchin.

John was essentially a shy, introspective person, who was not afraid of being alone. Even as a child he probably could be described as a loner, practiced “escapism” in which he became proficient in cartooning, something which he was very good at all his life, story writing, casting of plays using paper dolls as actors and actresses, and carrying on endless wars using bottle caps as soldiers. Being alone also led him to develop a philosophical approach to life and a vigorous prayer life that became the basis of his spirituality and deepened his interest in scripture.

Following the break-up of his parents’ marriage, his mother took the family to Detroit where they remained. During this time he read an article in *St. Anthony Messenger* about the Capuchins being the strictest of the three Franciscan Orders. He also read about Solanus Casey, and his work with troubled people. This brought about great interest in the Capuchins. He regretted all his life for not having the courage to go to the monastery and meet Solanus.

Then came a stint in the army. John said “I enjoyed the army. To be sure, what I saw of the army was its better side: no war, no police action, just maneuvers and barrack life. But nevertheless it is an important fact that I liked the army, liked it when most of my buddies hated it or barely tolerated it and could not wait to get out.”

While on duty one night in Germany, guarding the ammo supply, John was looking up into the starry night and at that moment he was determined to become a religious. This thought never left him in the immediate years ahead. During these years he became more and more involved with church matters, joining the Legion of Mary, trying to live as a Franciscan Tertiary without actually joining officially, all the time delivering mail for many years. John was extremely comfortable walking his mail route and enjoying his thoughts in silence, many of which revolved around becoming a religious, a priest or deacon in the church. During this time John also did quite a bit of writing: novels, short stories or scriptural matters. He carried on this practice until he died. He loved to write, even writing a long, detailed account of his life. This life’s work began with his early life and then was discontinued for twenty years, until he wrote a little more before he died.

His thoughts about a life in religion never left him. After one meeting with an official from the Archdiocese of Detroit discussing the possibility of priesthood, the permanent diaconate was suggested to him. Then he was told that if he was serious about the priesthood he might look into a religious order. He was then given a list of four religious orders, all four Franciscans, including the Capuchins.

John soon became part of the Capuchin formation program, pre-novitiate, novitiate at Huntington, Indiana, a year at St. Bonaventure’s in Detroit, caring for Herman Buss, then on to Milwaukee for clinical pastoral education. This was followed by two years at St. Elizabeth’s Parish. John wanted to work “in a black parish because, up to then, I had very little knowledge of black culture. I wanted to know whether I could really love those people, without judgment or a need to change them.” Following ordination to the priesthood John spent a good number of

years working in Montana among the Native Americans. He loved the work and cherished the times alone walking unto the stars or hiking among the flowers in the summer months.

While ministering in Montana John began to be interested in retreat work, and this led to some years at Monte Alverno Retreat House in Appleton. He loved the opportunity for contemplation and quiet walks with the dog. He also became very instrumental at this time in the founding of the Widows of Prayer, working with Mary Reardon. Following his stay in Appleton John spent four years ministering at St. Anthony Retreat House in Marathon, Wisconsin. John says of his days in Marathon, "Few places I have lived at in religious life can rival St. Anthony in my affection. To be sure, it had its drawbacks: too many bats and too many mosquitoes. These, however, were a very small price to pay for the delights of Saint Anthony. One of my favorite sayings these days is, "I'm so glad I have a vow of poverty! I never lived this well before." That is not humor, it is a fact. And Saint Anthony rates very high in my concept of what constitutes living well."

Following his stay at Marathon, John looked into semi-retirement and chose SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Huntington, where he then ministered very successfully for eight years, beloved by the people, even with his quiet demeanor. These years were followed by "retirement" once again where he continued to serve on a limited basis, for a number of years at Capuchin Retreat in Washington, Michigan. From Washington God took John home after a life of service and prayer.

John gets the last word. "Another phenomena of aging is that one learns to get along with others and appreciates them much better. People who once annoyed me no longer do so. I understand people better and so I love them wherever they are in their life. The cliché rings true. 'There are no bad people, there are only good people, who, for reasons of their own, do bad things.' I have learned to love people in spite of what they do."

Slowly, for me, the fear of death is giving way to the eagerness for the encounter with God. As Saint Paul puts it: " There are three things that last: faith hope and love." Of the three, love is the only one that is forever.

— Ron Rieder