

Neerology

Thomas Schmied
1943-2018



Thomas Francis Schmied was born on Holy Thursday, April 22nd, 1943 in Columbus Wisconsin. He was baptized on Mother's Day, May 9th, 1943. Tom was the child of Francis Anthony Schmied and Lorraine Mercedes Schultheis. Tragically, Tom's father died in Second World War on June 1st, 1944. His earliest memory was of his grandfather, enveloping him in his arms and sobbing uncontrollably.

Tom's mother later remarried Anthony John Wedel, who became a loving step-father to Tom and provided two more sisters and a brother. He grew up in a practicing Catholic family on an 80 acre farm, receiving the sacrament of Eucharist on October 18th, 1951, and Confirmation on March 15th 1956. Tom's rural roots always remained with him and he found great pleasure in stating that he had a garden in nearly every place he was assigned. His youngest sister, Sandy, remembers him as a loner, but also attests that she never really got to know him because he left the farm to attend the Capuchin staffed seminary at Mount Calvary, Wisconsin at fourteen years of age. He graduated from St. Lawrence in 1961, and in that same year joined the Capuchins on August 31st. Tom made his first profession of vows the following year on September 1st, 1962. Tom continued his studies at Crown Point, Indiana and Marathon, Wisconsin, professing his perpetual vows on September 1st, 1967. After completing his theological studies was ordained to the presbyterate on September 12th, 1969.

In his ministry Tom served as a Secular Franciscan Spiritual Assistant in Detroit; and then as a chaplain of Milwaukee area hospitals. He helped out in parishes and then joined the Capuchin preachers for nine years giving retreats throughout the region. These nine years developed his preaching, keeping his homilies simple and short. I mention this because in common parlance, his conversations would string sentences, one after another, without stopping. He had so much information to share and he was determined to share it. I once told him when I lived with him at St. Clare Retreat House that I didn't ever have to read the paper because when I came in for coffee he had already read the morning *Free Press*, and proceeded to tell me in exquisite detail everything he read! He never preached that way and when I heard him, he was good, solid and to the point.

Tom was then assigned to serve as associate pastor at St. Mary's in Marathon, WI. He served there for two years before beginning his longest stretch of ministry (twenty years) in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In the Upper Peninsula, living alone in his simple trailer, which served as his base, he traveled as an itinerant friar, putting more than 300,000 miles on his beloved red truck. Tom's ministry consisted in providing very needed assistance to the local clergy in their local parishes; allowing them time for their needed respite from their parish work; and allaying their isolation. Tom remembered each pastor, each place and knew so many names and faces throughout the Diocese of Marquette. Tom's memory was amazing! I believe this ministry suited him best. It allowed for his itinerancy and his genuine willingness to be of service. The

next couple of years were spent as pastor of Holy Redeemer Parish in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, where he was 'on loan' to the Province of Mary Mother of the Good Shepherd. Finally, from 2010-2018, he was called to serve as pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish (the former Churches of Sts. Anthony, Casmir and George) in the Diocese of Saginaw, MI.

Tom, by his own admission was not easy to live with in community. He had definite ideas and was a tad inflexible and he didn't forgive quickly, but tended to brood over perceived wrongs. I told him often that it was his stubborn, dark German temperament, and quoted him the adage: "You can always tell a German, but you can't tell him much." He didn't like it, and he said that I could make that Irish if I wanted to! I replied, "I said it first!" He confided in me that he was better if he could come to community from the outside.

Those of us who knew him well, certainly had to put up with his eccentricities, and he had a few. Tom was not a fan of authority. He didn't always make it easy for leadership. He also was a bit of a hoarder. One of Tom's parish members said that Tom had everything but a garbage can, because he didn't need one because he saved everything. And if you tried to throw out what was clearly "junk," he would know exactly what was missing. If he was in your area, Tom would drop by unannounced as a guest and expect lunch or dinner and expect that you just drop everything. He even arranged for me to entertain guests that he would bring up to Sanford for me to prepare a meal; and there would be little notice. He would drive me a little crazy because in order to stop him from talking, you had to be rude and interrupt. He was given the Native American name by one of the friars: "Tommy-talks-a-lot." He did drive us to patience. I read once, in a spiritual book somewhere, that God covers his saints with eccentricities to protect them. It seems so true of Tom.

In the second reading, (Philippians 3: 7-16) that Tom chose for his funeral liturgy and his memorial liturgy, we do get a glimpse of Tom's beautiful soul. Tom was Christ's worker; he belonged to Him. He worked so hard, visited so many people, sent cards and stopped to visit folks that others had forgotten. He was so kind and thoughtful. He was at every diocesan meeting, every Capuchin event and brought home programs for others to see and share. The brothers marveled at his ability to be present to so many things. In the Diocese of Saginaw, the bishop called for participation and presence in Eucharistic hour of adoration in order to pray for vocations. The bishop lead these holy hours throughout the diocese. Tom was at every one of them. He was so incredibly faithful.

Tom suffered a great deal in his self-image. He felt a lack of appreciation for him from the brothers; he quoted Ken Stuart's comment about himself: "that Tom was the most overlooked friar." Tom felt that he was the "odd man out." Tom also suffered from brooding over wrongs, the flip side of his good memory; but if you knew Tom, you knew that he brought everything to prayer. He was so faithful to the Divine Office, to spiritual reading, to the Eucharist. And just as Christ promised, everything was tempered there, healed there. Christ straining Tom forward, forgetting what lies behind, to what lies ahead, the upward calling of Christ Jesus was always Tom's goal and his prize.

As I mentioned, Tom's biological father died in World War II. He once confided in me that he thought his whole life was pivoted from that event. He said: "I was always looking for my father. My step-father was good to me, but I was still always looking for my father. I think that's what brought me to Calvary, what brought me to the order; that fatherly care offered by

the elder Capuchins. I've wondered about the legitimacy of my vocation." I responded: "How faithful of God to use a tragic event and turn it around for the good of so many people's lives you have touched; God bringing good from evil." He wept.

Tom died peacefully in the joy of hearing the brothers at St. Fidelis pray the office and sing at Holy Mass. He expressed how beautiful that was for him. He entered fuller life on September 11th, 2018. It must have been a great reunion, the welcome of his family and his two earthly fathers; and the profound embrace of his Heavenly Father.

~ Daniel J. Fox