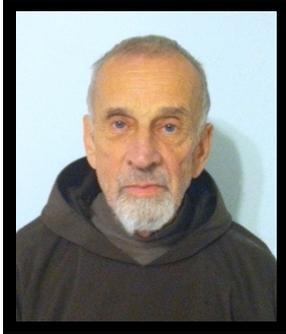


Necrology

Alexis Luzi
1925-2020

(Nota Bene: Much of the content for this document is taken from an autobiography which Alex submitted to the communications office, requesting that it be used as a resource for his necrology.)



Alexis Luzi was born in 1925, the son of Pasquale Luzi and Euphemia Luccahesii. His father was born in Italy, and migrated to the States with his brother, Andrew. He worked in Manitowoc, Wisconsin as a blacksmith. He and Euphemia were married in Manitowoc by the Justice of the Peace.

Alex was never close to his parents. In his autobiography, Alex described his father in a negative light. And he only knew his mother, he said, “as a woman locked up in a mental institution.” His mother did not speak English, and Alex did not speak Italian. So there was little, if any, communication between them. Even so, Alex would visit her periodically. “I did not visit her when I was in the order,” he wrote. “Even though I asked — more than once — to see her during my years at Marathon, I was refused by my superiors.” Alex was finally granted permission to visit his mother in July 1948. She died the next month.

Pasquale, Alex’s father, “was good natured and was liked by those in the community.” However, “while good natured in the community when sober, he was not that way in our home.” Pasquale was a “devoted alcoholic,” and this took a toll on Alex and his sister. “We never celebrated a birthday, nor had an Easter celebration, nor took part in the festivities of Christmas.”

Eventually, Alex’s pastor urged him to go to St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary WI. Alex liked Calvary, and had great respect for many of the friars there. He loved languages, and found intellectual nourishment at St. Lawrence.

After graduating from St. Lawrence Seminary High School in 1943, Alex joined the Capuchins. In 1947 he professed his perpetual vows, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1951. He served on the faculty of St. Lawrence Seminary from 1952 to 1954, at which time he was sent to Rome for higher studies. In 1956 he earned a degree in dogmatic theology from Gregorian University. He returned to the States and was appointed to the faculty at St. Anthony Seminary in Marathon WI where he taught until 1969.

That year, Alex was named assistant pastor of St. Elizabeth Parish (now St. Martin de Porres) in Milwaukee, and a year later was appointed local minister and pastor of St. Benedict the Moor Parish in Milwaukee. There he inherited the Community Meal program, which he expanded and embellished. Following his eight-year tenure there, +Brian Braun offered some reflections on the importance of Alex’s impact on the St. Ben’s Community Meal program:

“Alex came to St. Ben’s and saw the condition of the people. It seemed to those who knew him that his heart was deeply centered to care for the people of the parish, with a genuine Gospel perspective. His insights were not of those who organize for efficiency; his interest was in the dignity of those who fell into hardship, for whatever reason. The success of the meal program is founded in the theological reflection that Alexis brought there. Any excitement in his personality was moved by the words that Jesus spoke when urging His followers to feed the hungry.”

In 1978, Alex left St. Ben’s Parish and took up residence in an apartment close to St. Conrad Friary, which he visited regularly. During the almost three decades he lived alone, he helped out at some of the city’s parishes, and published his homilies online.

Alex was a prolific homilist. Ironically, he didn’t like to read. In his autobiography, he wrote that “I fill my hours with my creative mind. Information I gather for my homilies and my writings are not taken from books. It requires me to dig deep into my own thinking capacities. While others may find eloquence in quoting noted authors, I feel that ideas for my homilies are gleaned from my life experiences.”

Alex’s homilies would be considered “progressive” by any standards. He was a consistent supporter of the changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council, and cleverly mixed politics and theology in his homilies, which not infrequently brought complaints from some of the more conservative parishioners where he preached. “I am a prophet,” he wrote in 2001. “I am detached enough from the clutter of the world that I can be prophetic. Institutions seem to reign dominantly in people’s lives. I say I am a prophet because others have consistently told me this, and I believe them.”

Alex moved to Texas in 2008 to live with his sister. He returned to Wisconsin in 2013 and took up residence with the St. Fidelis Community in Appleton.

Alex will be remembered by many as a compassionate, caring friar and priest who exemplified the “best” of the church. Some of the friars also remember him as a troubled brother who could be harsh, demanding, and difficult to live with in community. No doubt, both of those perspectives can be attributed to a very difficult and troubled family situation. All his life, Alex tried to make the best of his upbringing. He said that his religious vocation “was born from the wrong motive.” Reflecting on the 30 years he lived alone, he said that what makes his life meaningful are the ideals of St. Francis. “Those ideals keep me focused and give me steady direction to my life. With those ideals, I do not need community. I don’t need anyone... I was born alone and lived alone and came into the Capuchin community. In time, I had no problem returning to being alone.”

Like so many of us, Alex displayed a keen sense of ministry to those who were marginalized; and, again — like so many of us — struggled with personal issues that often strained his fraternal relationships.

Alex Luzi died on 22 June 2020 at the age of 95.

~ TL Michael Auman