

Fr. Solanus Casey

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Venerable Solanus Casey, an American-born Capuchin priest who died in 1957, will be beatified at a Nov. 18 Mass in Detroit.

Who was Fr. Solanus Casey? Known for his great faith, attention to the sick, and ability as a spiritual counselor, he will be the second American-born male to be beatified.

Born Bernard Casey on Nov. 25, 1870, he was the sixth child of 16 born to Irish immigrants in Wisconsin. At age 17 he left home to work at various jobs, including as a lumberjack, a hospital orderly, and a prison guard.

Re-evaluating his life after witnessing a drunken sailor brutally stab a woman to death, he decided to act on a call he felt to enter the priesthood. Because of his lack of formal education, however, he struggled in the minor seminary, and was eventually encouraged to become a priest through a religious order rather than through the diocese.

So in 1898, he joined the Capuchin Franciscans in Detroit and after struggling through his studies, in 1904 was ordained a “sacerdos simplex” – a priest who can say Mass, but not publicly preach or hear confessions.

He was very close to the sick and was highly sought-after throughout his life, in part because of the many physical healings attributed to his blessings and intercession. He was also a co-founder of Detroit's Capuchin Soup Kitchen in 1929.

For 21 years he was porter at St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit.

He is also known for his fondness for playing the violin and singing, although he had a bad singing voice because of a childhood illness which damaged his vocal chords.

Even in his 70s, Fr. Solanus Casey remained very active, and would even join the younger religious men in a game of tennis or volleyball. He died from erysipelas, a skin disease, on July 31, 1957, at the age of 87.

A miracle attributed to Venerable Casey's intercession was recognized by Pope Francis at a May 4 meeting with Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

“I'm grateful to hear from the Capuchin friars that the date of the beatification has been finalized,” Archbishop Allen Vigneron of Detroit stated.

“The beatification of Father Solanus will be a tremendous blessing for the whole community of southeast Michigan, an opportunity for all of us to experience the love of Jesus Christ.”

The Nov. 18 beatification Mass will be said at Ford Field in Detroit, which can accommodate as many as 60,000.