

IN REMEMBRANCE

A reflection by Capistran Ferrito, O.F.M. Cap.

This pause in the Liturgical Farewell to our Brother Crispin gives us the opportunity to book review his life. Like every human being, his life pages are a mixture of the good and the not so good. What is of significance to us is the good in Brother Crispin's life.

Keeping in mind the following facts, we can better appreciate the few things we are going to say. Brother Crispin was born on 28 December 1883. He died on 17 February 1971. This makes him better than 87 years of physical age. He was invested with the Capuchin habit on 29 January 1903. This makes him better than 68 years of Capuchin age.

Like many remarkable religious of his caliber, the great, the outstanding, the exceptionally good things he did are of the small, unnoticed, taken-for-granted variety. Whole paragraphs of Br. Crispin's life can be found in the old-fashioned, pre-Vatican II lives of holy people. Not that we are making a saint of him. We merely want to review a few of his saintly qualities. This might be boring in our day and age; but, then, these are the qualities people like Brother Crispin developed, up until now, in their quest for sanctity!

We might start off by saying, "He was a faithful servant to duty." My recollections go back some twenty years to Our Lady of Sorrows Church. It was my first assignment. I remember Br. Crispin as porter. The doorbell would ring! He would shuffle to answer it. He would find out what the caller wanted. He would ring the big gong that existed there in those days to summon the Father to the office. And then he would return to his rosary. On the cook's day off, he would prepare a simple, substantial meal and still answer the door, and still return to finger his beads. You might recall he carried the rosary around his neck.

Another consideration: "He was at early Mass each morning." Even during the last few years of his life at St. John, the friars can attest to this. We remember seeing him sitting in the chapel at St. John at six o'clock in the morning, while Fr. Frederick [Cameron] would say a Latin Mass. Once in a while, someone else substituted for the celebrant, but Br. Crispin was always there to answer the prayers.

"He had a simple sense of humor." You remember the armchair he used all day long, in the room next to the kitchen at St. John. We often heard his hearty laugh while visiting with Br. Francis [Liermann] who would stop by during the day to bring him a glassful of half and half – half wine and half water. Fr. Walter [O'Brien] recalls how he chuckled the time he learned the names of those elected to our newly formed Provincial Senate. Actually he laughed not at the friars elected, but at the thought that crossed his mind. Without an ounce of malice, he dubbed them the Katzenjammer Kids. He had a simple sense of humor.

"He enjoyed the simple pleasures of life." Any friar who would pass his "sitting station" at St. John will remember hearing the battered old radio by Crispin's side. He would listen to news, opera and ballgames of all kinds. I remember Fr. Dermot [Kelly] and Fr. Ernest [Reardon], both of whom, as everyone knows, are knowledgeable in sports, talking about Br. Crispin's remarkable memory, sports-wise. He was able to talk about old and new ballplayers and teams with the ease of a sportscaster. He really enjoyed the simple pleasures of life.

"He did his 'own thing' long before it became fashionable." And he did this until the end of his life, and close to home. Br. Crispin did not involve himself in protest parades, in protest groups, in protest against the Establishment, either religious or secular. He did, however, like good friars everywhere, allow himself the luxury of expressing a pet peeve or a gripe. It wasn't the lack of physical or intellectual ability that stopped him from involvement. It was simply that he found plenty to do right under his nose, and for those near him.



Capuchin Friar
Br. Crispin Marschhaeuser
1883-1971

And this is to me, his claim to fame. We sum it up in a word picture of this 87 year old man, this 67 year religious friar. Up until a few days before he was confined to bed, it was a common sight to see Br. Crispin shuffle along with his cane, from his armchair to the stock room in back of the kitchen. He would fix up a case of half beer and half soda. Then, step by step, dragging the case with his cane, or pushing it, he would climb two flights of stairs to the recreation room. He would, on bended knee, leaning on his cane, proceed to fill the refrigerator in the recreation room. It is remarkable that this almost daily chore of his was only recalled when Br. Crispin was no longer doing it. The empty icebox made the friars remember. Yet many a friar quenched his thirst with a cool draft without so much as recognizing the fact that Br. Crispin had made it possible.

When Fr. Robert [Owermohle] heard of Br. Crispin's death, he commented, "He was a great guy." During the past few days, as friars viewed Br. Crispin, or spoke of his passing, many murmured, "He was a great Brother." And his greatness is that he did 67 religious years of little things, and he did them well. He joins the memory of great Capuchin friars who have gone before him. God grant you the eternal rest you richly deserve, Brother Crispin! Rest in peace.