

Sylvan Conover, O.F.M. Cap.

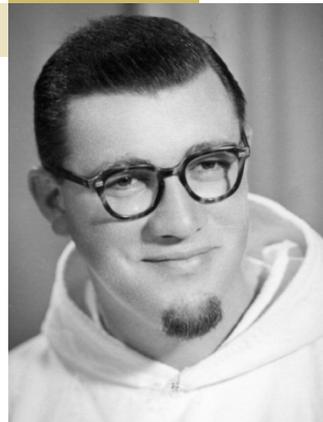
A Reflection by Robert Phelps, O.F.M. Cap.

Isaiah tells us this morning that 'On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples.' The prophet reminds us that God will be the ultimate punctuation of our lives. It is God who gives us life, it is the same God who asks us to live faithfully in the shadow of his wings, as we await his promise of the kingdom; it is God who, through the inevitable and inescapable experience of human death will ultimately enable us to understand fully his gracious purpose. This is that gift of faith that promises ultimate sensibility to each of our life's journeys, and through this gift of faith we pray that God now unfolds his gracious plan to our brother Sylvan.

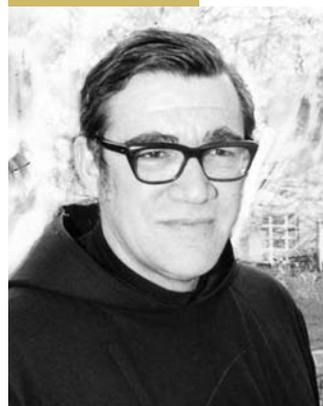
Our brother had the nickname 'Doc,' although this was evidently given to him when he was in formation, and I never knew why. In the Marianas, the older friars called him by that name.

Well, I have another more modern name for our brother. There is a children's film where the hero is a large green character, strong, imposing but sensitive, whose name is **Shrek**. Well, our brother Sylvan was no green character in a children's cartoon, but he was a large, strong, imposing, yet sensitive and prayerful friar. He was a giant among the shorter Micronesians he loved so much. As he grew older and feebler in recent years, Sylvan's large back was bent, and he seemed inches lower than when he was younger and healthy amid the islanders, head and shoulders over everyone. He was a gentle giant among the people on Saipan and Guam, and that's how I remember him. Our Brother Shrek, O.F.M. Cap.

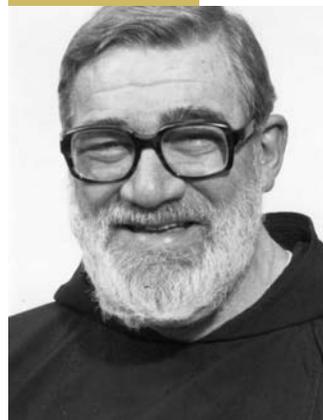
Sylvan loved his call to Capuchin Franciscan brotherhood and delighted when he could join friars whenever and wherever they gathered. I remember when, in the year 2000, a few of my classmates threw a surprise 60th birthday party for me; and along with classmates, there was Sylvan.



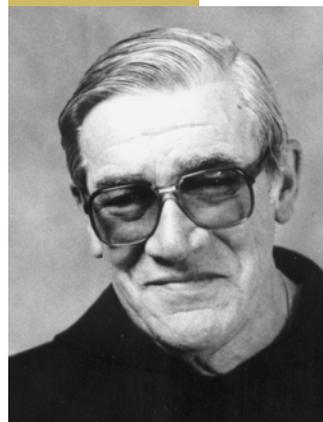
1966



1972



1988



2006

Sylvan was a great lover of the movies. During his years of service on the tiny island of Saipan, the sidewalks were rolled up at sunset. There was very little pastoral work done in the evening hours, unlike our present time. The story is that he and Mel McCormack would attend an old movie every night at one of three venues: The Coast Guard Station at San Antonio; or the Ichihara Theatre, which Sylvan called the Itchy; and the Matsumoto Theatre which he would call The Scratchy. I remember also when, back in 1975, I was on summertime assignment at Smithtown; Sylvan, who was at the time chaplain at North Shore Hospital, invited me to the movies, to a new film called Jaws; and how we were very late and had to sit in the first row. I think I lost forever some of the allotted portion of my life that day.

Today's Gospel words of Jesus remind us that 'these things' that is, what we have been promised in the reign of God will be hidden from the sophisticates, and be present naturally to the childlike. Our brother Sylvan had, in many ways, a child-like enjoyment of God's gifts, especially when he wasn't stressed and immobilized by illness.

As we mourn for our brother Sylvan, the apostle Paul gives us a great insight into our frailty and vulnerability, as well as our great hope. 'We are not discouraged, Paul writes, rather, though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.'

Paul is telling us that we, who are, in Paul's words, 'wasting away', even if the reality of our deaths is years away, that we are being made, by God's gracious will, more and more alive every day, until that day when we possess that 'abundant life' promised to us by the One who was dead and who now lives forever at the right hand of God the Father, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Given at Sacred Heart Church,
Yonkers, New York
Saturday, 30 May 2009

