

Women Retreatants Slate Convention

St. Paul, Minn. — (N.C.) — Inez M. Quinn, Minneapolis, president of the Cenacle Retreat League here. One day will be spent here, another in Minneapolis, and a special program will be held at Our Lady of the Cenacle's Retreat House at Wayzata, Lake Minnetonka.

FOUR YEARS IN A RED HELL

How Father Rigney Masked Prayer

Here is the sixth installment in the gripping story of the imprisonment of the Very Rev. Harold W. Rigney, S.V.D., presented in the Courier-Journal through courtesy of the Chicago Sun-Times.

By the Very Rev. Harold W. Rigney, S.V.D., Divine Word Missionary

One morning in December of 1951, prisoner Lu, who had become chu chang (cell leader) in my prison cell, shouted at me:

"Rigney, what are you doing?"

"I am just squatting and praying while waiting to file out to the open latrine."

"I am just squatting waiting for the officer to open the door for us," I said.

Forced To Squat For Hours

Squatting was a torture; the judge hearing my case forced me to squat daily for hours on end. I suffered, from this at first, but later noticed this cramped position was becoming less painful. To harden myself, I began to squat whenever I could.

On this particular morning, the chu chang suspected I was praying. "Rigney, do you ever pray?" he asked.

"Yes, I pray," I replied.

There was silence. But Lu evidently made a mental note of the incident since he later reported to the prison officer that I prayed frequently and even counted my prayers on my fingers. This was true when I said my rosary, counting on fingers instead of beads.

Roars At Him

On one occasion, I sat motionless, except for a slight movement of my lips, which I thought could not be noticed. Suddenly Lu roared at me:

"Rigney, are you praying?"

"I nodded. He followed angrily: "Praying! What are you praying for? You should be thinking about your crimes. God cannot help you. Only the 'People's' government can help you. You fool, you're wasting your time with your silly prayers. Stop praying and think of the crimes you have committed against the Chinese people!"

But I continued to pray. Every day I counted from three to 10 rosaries for my daily office and other intentions. I said many more prayers, and meditation became sweet as never before.

The Communists could deprive me of my liberty and torture me. But they could not prevent me from turning my mind and raising my heart above the foulness of their world to divine realities.

The issue of prayer came up anew one spring day in 1953. An official of the prison, who

to the government, Julian, who spoke English well, made a vigorous effort to get me to give up praying, but I stood my ground.

In the fall of 1953, I was given another "helper" named Han, an English-speaking Chinese. He watched me closely and one night noticed that my lips were moving while I slept.

Of course I went to sleep praying and it was not surprising if my lips continued to move while I was asleep. But I preferred to keep this simple explanation to myself. To Han, I said:

"A sleeping man is not responsible for his actions."

Thereafter, Han watched vigilantly to see if I were indulging in forbidden prayer. On Christmas day of 1953, he told me he had gotten up several times during the night to see if I was secretly praying. He suspected that I had arisen during the night to perform some "secret" religious Christmas rite.

During my imprisonment, I longed to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the mass, to pray my divine office, to receive the holy Eucharist, to visit and pray before the blessed sacrament. But all these were denied me for the 1,509 days I was a Communist prisoner in Peiping.

Often I dreamed of celebrating the holy sacrifice of the mass, usually in the university Chapel of the Divine Word or in the immaculately clean and beautiful chapel of those good sisters of Fu Jen Catholic University, the Holy Ghost Missionary Sisters.

These were happy, but brief dreams that dissolved when I awoke in my cell in a Communist prison modeled after hell.

Ts'ao Lan Tzu (the Communist prison in Peiping) is like hell," I often thought.

But there was one consolation: Ts'ao Lan Tzu could not last forever. It would come to

Ts'ao Lan Tzu is bad enough, but with God's help, I would avoid the eternal Ts'ao Lan Tzu — the eternal hell! Copyright 1953 by the Very Rev. H. W. Rigney. All rights reserved. COURIER-JOURNAL, Friday, March 16, 1956. 5

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Fettered Father Rigney reaches for food. (Drawing by Milton Caniff.)

discovered that I prayed, questioned me on the subject. "Do you ever pray, Rigney?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Pu hsing! Pu hsing! (That is not allowed! That is not allowed!)" he shouted, his face purple with anger.

"How often do you pray?"

"Every day."

"Pu hsing! Pu hsing!" He shook his fist under my nose and lectured me that if I was forbidden to pray at any time, even while in bed, before retiring or on rising.

Seeks To Persuade

After he left, prisoner Julian, a Eurasian "Catholic," attempted to persuade me to stop praying.

Julian was another of my cellmate "helpers," a prisoner delegated by the authorities to watch my every move. Listen to my every word and report all

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