

## West Webster Parish To Celebrate 500th Anniversary Of Patron Saint

By REV. HENRY ATWELL  
Modern St. Rita's Church in West Webster will be the scene of a 500th anniversary this Wednesday, May 22.

Pastor and parishioners of the spic-and-span seven-year-old parish will keep their patron's feast day which this year marks the 500th anniversary of her death.

St. Rita, "saint of the impossible," died May 22, 1457.

Feast day services at 7:45 p. m. will include blessing and distribution of "St. Rita Roses" and veneration of the saint's relic.

A triduum in preparation will be held Monday through Wednesday at the Maple Drive church each evening at 7:45. Preaching at the services will be Augustinian friar Father James Sherman.

St. Rita was an Augustinian nun.

The story of the popular saint has few parallels in church history. Little known except within her own order for nearly five centuries, her canonization in 1900 launched a widespread devotion toward this fifteenth century mother and nun.

Almost every diocese in the United States has a parish dedicated in her honor, many parish churches though bearing the name of a different saint have a statue or picture of St. Rita, and Rita as a girl's name is still high on the popularity list at least in Catholic families.

Not only is the current devotion a unique characteristic of the saint. Her life itself is strange, almost unbelievable in its mixture of violence in marriage ending with anguish in the convent.

ST. RITA'S home was a hillside hamlet near Cascia in Italy's picturesque province of Umbria.

She was the only child of aged parents Antonio Mancini and Amata Ferri.

Her striking beauty attracted the attention of a village roustabout named Ferdinand. His courtship and her parents' promptings changed Rita's path from a convent vocation to a marriage with the man who was to ruin eighteen years of her life.

She entered her marriage hoping to reform the faults and follies of Ferdinand but he disregarded her pleadings.

Rampant in Italy at that time was the dreaded vendetta, long a curse across southern Europe, which spilled blood and tears with sudden hatred. Ferdinand barely survived one riot or fight long enough to get himself involved in another.

He lived close to death daily but gave little thought as to what might be after death.

RITA FOUND consolation from the Augustinian nuns who told her the story of St. Monica, the tearful mother of her order's founder, St. Augustine, who was also once a renegade and profligate. Rita imitated Monica in her life of tears and prayers.

After seven years of bitter unhappiness in her marriage, the "saint of the impossible" had her prayers answered in the conversion of her husband.

THE REPENTANT husband had only a few days of grace, however, when the vendetta lashed out against him and he fell by an assassin's sword. The

### 'Saint of the Impossible'



Children at St. Rita's school, West Webster, take a close look at relic at foot of statue of their parish patron St. Rita's last Wednesday, May 22, marks 500th anniversary of her death. Popular devotion turns her 'saint of the impossible.'

Joy of a happy wife was suddenly plunged into a widow's sorrow, with the added grief that her two orphaned sons swore vengeance against their father's assassin.

Rather than witness her sons as murderers, Rita prayed, "If these children should avenge a father's murder by defiling their own souls with blood, deign to take them, Lord, to Thy own keeping before the crime be enacted."

Again her prayer was answered. This time, promptly.

Within the space of one year, the sons died and Rita knelt to pray at the triple grave of husband and two sons.

And all this tragedy, sorrow, anguish in a heart not yet thirty-five years old.

The young widow thought again of her childhood dream of being a nun.

The Augustinian nuns turned down her request for admission.

Then "the impossible" happened. The event was examined and authenticated by church authorities at Rome at the time of Rita's beatification.

While the widowed and rejected saint was at prayer, three saints appeared to her: St. John the Baptist, St. Augustine, and St. Nicholas of Tolentine, and escorted her to the Augustinian convent, entering the cloister without moving a bolt or door knob. Faced with an obvious miracle, the nuns changed their rejection to prompt acceptance, admitting Rita to their community.

HER CONVENT devotions centered on the sorrows of Christ on His Cross. One day while praying before a cruci-

fix, St. Rita asked to feel a portion of Christ's sufferings. Witnesses state that a thorn of the crucified image was detached from the cross and imbedded in the saint's forehead.

The wound and intense pain remained with her until her death, and is shown in pictures and statues of the saint today.

In January of 1457, when the saint was in her last illness, she asked a friend to bring her a rose from the convent garden. The friend was amazed to discover a fresh rose growing from the frozen ground and recognized it as a symbol of the saint's soul "a garden of delights" in the eyes of God. The miracle rose episode is the basis of the present day "St. Rita's Roses" which are blessed and distributed to the faithful in her memory.

St. Rita was 76 years old when she died and her story seemed to die with her.

Remarkable favors were reported worked through her intercession and finally in 1900 she was canonized after a thorough investigation by church officials at Rome.

Within a few years, the forgotten saint became a world wide center of devotion. Novenas, prayers, shrines, parishes, were dedicated in her honor.

Today, half a century after her canonization, and 500 years after her death, the "saint of the impossible" seems destined by God to play a significant role in the modern world by her example of fidelity in marriage and her fervor in a religious vocation.

## Moscow Library Orders Africa Missioner's Book

Techny, Ill.—(NC)—Now what do they want that for? The Divine Word Fathers have puzzled over that question because of an order received at their publications office for a priest's book on the mission history of a West Africa country.

The order came from the Lenin National Library in Moscow — yep, the one in Russia.

The order requests a copy of the book "Gold Coast Mission History, 1471-1880," written by Divine Word Father Ralph W. Wittgen and published here at the community's U.S. headquarters.

The volume was written earlier this year before the West Coast became independent and changed its name to Ghana.

Despite all the speculation on the Russian library's interest in the volume, it will be sent — and by registered

### BOOK SHELF

### The Braintree Mission

Sr. Margaret Teresa, Nazareth College

THE BRAINTREE MISSION: A FICTIONAL NARRATIVE OF LONDON AND BOSTON, 1770-1771, by Nicholas Wyckoff. Macmillan '57. 184 pp. Book-of-the-Month.

From its spruce salt-water jacket to the last of the great William Pitt's comments on John Adams ("Altogether dangerous," he insisted, "altogether dangerous"), this is a novel to delight American prejudices and to satisfy one's sense of proportion and finish.

It has the clean, subdued finesse, the sweet-with-sour, of a ripe plum. It is written in pure idiomatic English, undiluted and unstylized, the kind we once thought would always be the medium of good writers.

What is more, this quiet triumph of good English includes a sustained eighteenth century conversation, the chief narrative device of every chapter in the book, of just the right cadence and elegance and forthrightness combined for an exchange between Adames and an English Earl in Boston Tea Party days.

"MR. ADAMS looked at the peer . . . Since you spoke of the failure of understanding between Old England and New, my lord, you will excuse my speaking plainly of what may appear a very provincial ignorance. But the exchange of information between Boston and London is so faulty that we of this town are not aware of your office."

"The Earl of Hemyng recognized that he was being asked, 'Who are you?' He rather enjoyed the sensation.

"I hold no office in the government, sir. I have been commissioned by the ministry to conduct a negotiation whose nature may not yet be disclosed . . ."

LORD HEMYNGE has come to Boston to restore peaceful colonial relations, and to do so by a

means considered absolutely certain to appeal to the rebel leaders. Nobody could be so unkind as to spoil the story by telling this secret means before he does — but it is fair to say that the Cockney servant Tom, the Royal Governor Hutchinson, the great Pitt are good subsidiary characters, that the Lord's encounters with Boston fog, Boston woolen underwear, and Boston independence are entertaining, that all the factual details are good history, that Abigail Adams is entirely charming.

Mr. Wyckoff's story, a first novel, throws its companion Book-of-the-Month, Steinbeck's "The Short Reign of Pippin IV," entirely into the shade. The first is a real jewel, the second synthetic.

### Twins In Class Of 45 Priests

Chicago — (NC) — Among 45 priests newly ordained here by Cardinal Stritch, Archbishop of Chicago, is a set of twins, Fathers Donald E. and Richard H. Heidkamp, sons of Mr. and Mrs. Emil Heidkamp of this city.

Also among the young priests is Father George H. Clements, the first Negro graduated from Quigley Preparatory Seminary and the second Negro graduated from St. Mary of the Lake major seminary at Mundelein, Ill.

### Students Read Catholic Press

New York — (NC) — The Catholic Press Association said a survey of 5,749 high school and college students in St. Louis shows that 84 per cent of them read Catholic magazines regularly.

Fourteen per cent of the students said they do not read them at all and two per cent said they read them occasionally.

Asked if they would purchase Catholic magazines sold on public newsstands, 55 per cent of the students said they would buy them regularly, 40 per cent said they would not buy them and five per cent said they would buy them occasionally.

Eighty-eight per cent of those questioned said Catholic magazines enter their homes on a regular basis.

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## Planned Parenthood Barred From Civic Fund Drive

Washington — (NC) — The Planned Parenthood Association of the District of Columbia was rejected by the United Community Services trustees as a participant in the United Civic Fund campaign here.

The action followed a protest by Washington's Auxiliary Bishop Philip M. Hannan.

"Catholic people consider the program of the Planned Parenthood Association, namely, the promotion of artificial birth control, as a serious violation of the law of Almighty God," said Bishop Hannan, who also is Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Washington.

Bishop Hannan said Catholic agencies are not trying to defeat the social program of the area, but simply making their position clear. He said inclusion of PPA in the fund would give rise to widespread and prolonged resentment. The trustees voted 45-0-3 to bar PPA.

However, the Planned Parenthood League of nearby Montgomery County, Md., was admitted to participate in the UCF campaign by the trustees of the Montgomery County Community Chest and Council.

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