

Priest Tells Of Life In Russian Work Camp

Can a man suffer hell and truly forgive his enemies?

By ROBERT SMETT

Unspeakable horror and suffering, unswerving faith and heroic endurance are related in the story of Father Gerhard A. Fittkau, a German priest who recently visited the U.S. on a lecture tour seeking aid for the oppressed expellees of his native land.

His story preceded his visit here in a published biography, "My Thirty-Third Year," in which he recounts his agonizing experience as a prisoner in a Russian work camp in 1944-45.

A VICTIM OF tuberculosis which caused the loss of one lung as a youth, Father Fittkau



MSGR. FITTKAU

was taken into custody by the Nazis.

A traditionally Catholic area and distant from sounds of war raging in other parts of Germany, Ermland stood in the path of the oncoming Russians who had begun their devastating pincer movement to end the war.

Father Fittkau's pastorate was to be short-lived. The cry, "The Russians are coming!" put his flock in a state of uncontrollable frenzy.

And the Russians came. Because of their success in the campaign so far, the Soviet troops were given a "hundred hours of freedom" in Ermland.



... even the powers of hell show us the way."

And the first horrors came... mothers and fathers helplessly bound to watch a teenage daughter raped by a dozen Mongolians... old men shot down in the streets... the parish church desecrated in the most abominable way.

THIS WAS THE beginning of the nightmare. Then came the month long trip in a boxcar to the Arctic regions of Russia. No heat, no light, no food... a corpse to sleep next to. And through it all Father Fittkau remembered that he was a priest... trying to console, help the dying, calming the hysterical.

But this was only the beginning. In the frozen northland, Father Fittkau had one friend, a Protestant minister — both were hated by the other prisoners. They read the Scripture to each other to keep their minds from cracking.

His body, broken, his spirit numbed, Father Fittkau continued to be a priest. Without the Sacrament, his only consolation was a daily reading of the Liturgy from a tiny, concealed missal. And even this was short-lived — the guards found the pages of the missal a perfect texture in which to roll their cigarettes.

And the nightmare continued. Dead bodies piled seven layers deep. The camp "doctor" showed them how to bury the corpses. "Take them by the heels, swing them in an arc and let go. Thirty to a grave — throw on some dirt — kaput."

THE OVERCROWDED camp became more crowded. Seven to a 6-foot bunk, three ridden with syphilis. The food never changed — a bowl of millet each day. Soon Father Fittkau felt worms in his stomach. His body covered with open ulcers, every movement, every touch of clothing became pure torture. And the clothing — taken from the new-dead, infested with vermin.

Now sleep was impossible. The only part of his body untouched by the purulent ulcers was his forehead. By placing his missal to it and leaning against a post, the priest was able to receive a little rest.

The months dragged on. When release finally came, Father Fittkau doubted, even with

There is a bitter-sweet ending. Father Fittkau finds his family again — a mother and father grown twenty years older in ten months. His broken, ulcer-ridden body is returned to health. He is rejoined to his beloved Bishop.

IN THE HORRORS of his memories are moments of grace. He remembers an elderly Lutheran minister, a Franciscan brother and himself squatting in a filthy cellar awaiting their exile. They exchange bits of food and consoling words. Expressing all of their thoughts, the minister says:

"Did the Russians have to come and teach us how to pray together after all these centuries? I think we are getting another lesson in the mysterious ways of Providence. Letting us suffer together is perhaps His way of teaching us what we have not learned even by common action against a common foe. It seems that God is using even the powers of hell to show us the way."

A dying man's belief and hope in the unity of all men.

The story of Father Fittkau is a fantastic one — if we did not believe — if we had not been

assured of man's inhumanity to man.

But the greatest chapter of Father Fittkau's story is the one of man's compassion, man's forgiveness.

THE READER of "My Thirty-Third Year" will tremble with the accounts of the revolting animal treatment accorded his fellow humans. Disgust rises in his throat to cry vengeance.

And yet, Father Fittkau, again surrounded by the remnants of his persecuted flock, says to them:

"Our sacrifice must be joined to our prayer. For us, this consists in the patient, faithful endurance of the injustices which we have suffered. That is how we can follow our Savior and carry with Him the terrible accumulation of guilt in this world. Only in this way do we break the power of evil."

Monsignor Fittkau is now a seminary professor at Essex, Werdun, Germany. Besides his teaching duties, he aids the extensive relief program for refugees in West Germany.

HE HAS ASKED Rochester area people to send him vestments, altar linens and chalices for the numerous "Mass stations" set up for refugees from Iron Curtain nations.

Items or contributions may be sent to him by contacting Mrs. J. Trevor Garmey, 89 Village Lane, Rochester, GR 3-3094.

Diocesan Clothing Collection Results Hit All-Time High

The 12th annual Catholic Bishops' Thanksgiving Clothing Collection, conducted in 143 parishes and two institutions of the Rochester Diocese during 1960 Thanksgiving week, amassed a record total of 444,749 pounds of usable clothing, bedding, and shoes, according to the final report issued this week by the Rev. E. Leo McMannus, diocesan director.

entrusted by Bishop Kearney to the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. Newspaper, radio and television publicity was directed by Miss Sophie Cudillo of the Council.

At the Bronx warehouse some 235 workers have been sorting the clothing, baling it and marking it for shipment to the needy overseas.

The Foreign Operations Administration makes available the ocean transportation and the actual distribution of the clothing is now being directed by the overseas personnel of Catholic Relief Services, the relief agency of the Catholic bishops of the United States.

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This total exceeds the previous record, established in the 1959 clothing campaign, by nearly 26 tons. Sacred Heart Cathedral likewise set a new record for individual parish contributions with a total of 42,000 lbs.

In issuing the report, Father McMannus expressed the deep gratitude of Bishop Kearney to the priests and people of the Diocese.

"These impressive figures represent the generous response of thousands of parishioners to the urgent appeal of Christ to aid those in need," said Father McMannus.

"They" represent also thousands of hours contributed by volunteer workers, during a busy holiday season, and spent in church halls, school basements, and rented stores in the otherwise unappealing work of sorting and packing clothing. They represent, too, a considerable expense to the individual parishes, which have borne the cost of shipping the clothing to the Bronx warehouse of Catholic Relief Services.

"All of this remarkable testifies to the deep charity and loyal cooperation of the priests and people of the Diocese."

PROMOTION of the Thanksgiving Clothing Collection was

Three Solemn Masses

Mark Retreat Movement

Solemn Masses to mark God's blessings on the closed laymen's retreat movement in the Diocese of Rochester during 1961 are scheduled in three churches of the diocese according to Very Rev. Thomas J. Fallon, C. S. S. R., rector of Notre Dame Retreat House, 246 Alexander St., Rochester.

The Annual Retreat Mass in Rochester will be celebrated at St. Joseph's Church, Franklin St., on Tuesday, Jan. 24, by Bishop Kearney at 8 p.m. This is a change from the first date set.

OUTSIDE THE See City the Masses will be celebrated on Tuesday, Jan. 17, at 8 p.m. This year the retreat Masses will be celebrated in St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua, and St. Ann's Church, Hornell.

Leaders in the various parishes are being urged to have a large turnout at each of the three Masses.

The Annual Masses mark the

official opening of the year of closed retreats for men at the Notre Dame Retreat House.

"The spiritual solace and physical relaxation enjoyed at the Retreat House are becoming more widely realized by men each year. Reservations for the weekend retreats are now being taken," Father Fallon said.

Benedict P. Badalamenti, Bridesmaids were Mrs. Verne Marks, sister of the bride, Mrs. Betty Trutschel and Miss Barbara Seitz.

Sign-Language Ceremony Joins Couple In Auburn

The heart speaks in silence and the unheard word is the sweetest sound."

A poet's words were brought to mind last week at St. Francis Assisi Church, Auburn, when a young man and woman silently pledged their marriage vows.

With a graceful movement of fingers they repeated in the language of the deaf-mute the age-old responses that would make them man and wife.

Miss Nancy Ann Perkins, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William J. Perkins Sr. of Moravia, became the bride of Louis M. Bianca, son of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Bianca of Auburn.

BOTH ARE graduates of the Rochester School for the Deaf.

Celebrant of the Nuptial Mass was the Rev. Vincent J. Donovan of Our Lady of Peace parish, Syracuse. He was assisted by the Rev. John J. Nacca and the Rev. William J. O'Brien.

Matron of honor was Mrs.

Robert E. Giusti was best man. Ushers were Robert F. Perkins and William J. Perkins Jr., both brothers of the bride, and Carl E. Smith.



MRS. LOUIS A. BIANCA

Verein Units To Honor Father Staub

Members of the Catholic Central Union (Verein) and National Catholic Women's Union will pay tribute to the memory of Rev. Jacob F. Staub at Mass in Holy Redeemer Church on Sunday, Jan. 15, at 11 a.m.

The date marks the anniversary of his death more than 35 years ago. During his lifetime, Father Staub was an ardent leader in and a staunch supporter of the principles for which these societies were organized.

THE REGULAR monthly meetings of both organizations will be held on Thursday, Jan. 19, at 8:00 p.m., in St. Joseph's Hall on Franklin St.

A report of the mission activities will be made at the Women's meeting, and the men will continue the discussion of Resolutions adopted by the State and National bodies. James Huether and Miss Helen Kehrig will preside.

Monroe DCCW Slates Meet

The Monroe County Council of Catholic Women will hold its first meeting of the New Year on Tuesday, Jan. 17, at the Columbus Civic Center, Parlor "A", at 8 p.m. Meeting will commence with the recitation of the Rosary.

A special announcement will be made by the moderator, the Rev. Joseph Reinhart.

FEATURED COMMITTEE will be Library and Literature. Miss Ruth Ashburn, chairman, has planned a program in preparation for February and Catholic Book Week—February 19-25. She will have many ideas to carry out the motto: "Unity in Faith Through Reading."

Holy Hour

Catholic Youth Adoration Holy Hour will be held at St. Joseph Church, Franklin St., Rochester, Sunday, Jan. 15 from 7 to 8 p.m.

Rev. Joseph M. Sasso, assistant pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church will conduct the exercises.

Annual Theatre Day Slated At Notre Dame

Sixth Annual Theatre Day of the Rochester diocesan unit, National Catholic Theatre Conference, will be held at Notre Dame High School, Elmira, Saturday, Jan. 28.

Sister M. Edwina, R.S.M., director of dramatics, is chairman.

Program includes performances, a panel discussion on careers in dramatics, lecture-demonstrations on costuming and casting.

SPECIAL GUEST will be Sister M. Honora, O.P., of Detroit, Michigan. A member of the Racine Dominicans, Sister Honora teaches drama at the Catholic University of America.

Personalities who will take part in the day's activities include: the Rev. Gabriel Stapleton, S.D.S., president of N.C.T.C., Frederick Townsend of Elmira Little Theatre, Bruce Klee of Elmira College, Miss Linda Lanigan, of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Also, Robert L ynough of Southside High School, Miss Ruth Henderson of Elmira Y.W.C.A., Bob Cahillman of Brooks Costume Co., Mrs. Robert Bride and Miss Suzanne



SISTER M. EDWINA

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