

Study of Mary brings grace to 'companion'

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Guido Del Rose's voice reveals much about the man.

He speaks softly but firmly, in well-modulated, rational tones — even as he talks about miracles, messages from Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a sun that reportedly danced in the skies over Fatima, Portugal, more than 70 years ago.

"The message of Fatima is really the message of our savior, Jesus Christ," Del Rose declares calmly. "God is most pleased with us when we offer up our suffering and our prayers so he can convert sinners with them."

Del Rose is one of the two companions for the National Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima. On Wednesday, Aug. 16, he brought the statue to St. Anne's Church, Rochester, for an evening program of prayer, the rosary and a talk about both the apparition of Our Lady at Fatima and the history of the statue.

A companion of the pilgrim virgin statue since 1971, Del Rose says he is even more deeply convinced of the message of Mary than he was when he became interested in Fatima in the 1960s.

"Over the years, with study and research, I can see a rational, intellectual base to it," Del Rose says. "Before, it was more of an emotional base, almost a grace instinct. It was more of the heart than of the head."

But while his dedication to Mary and the story of Fatima has an intellectual base, Del Rose has obviously found enough "heart" to sustain him through months of ceaseless travel with the statue. Prior to his evening at St. Anne's, he had spent three days in Auburn and four days in Auriesville, N.Y. After his Rochester visit, he was off for one-day stops in Syracuse and Binghamton, and a week in the Youngstown, Ohio, area.

On the road essentially since last November, Del Rose will finally be able to return to his home in Crest Hill, Ill. — near Joliet — in September. Then he hopes to take a two-month break, but he's not certain at this point whether he will be able to.

Demand for visits from the statue has

grown slowly but steadily in recent years, Del Rose explains.

"Pope John Paul II with his devotion to Our Lady has helped a lot," he says. He also notes that interest had grown in light of the reported appearances of Our Lady at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, since 1981. Del Rose is cautious, however, when speaking of the alleged appearances at Medjugorje. "I talk only about the appearances that are approved officially by the church," he says.

Del Rose first became interested in the Fatima story in the 1960s. An ex-seminarian turned junior-high-school English teacher, he began reading about and researching the reported appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three children in Fatima.

The manifestations began May 13, 1917, when Lucia Santos, Francisco Marto and Jacinta Marto saw a lady appear in a cloud on a tree. The lady, who identified herself as Our Lady of the Rosary, appeared each month thereafter until October 13.

During the visits, the lady asked the children if they were willing to suffer in reparation for sins and for the conversion of sinners. She also requested that they attend Mass and receive Communion the first Saturday of every month, and say the rosary daily for peace. She revealed to them a vision of hell, foretold World War II, asked that the people of Russia be dedicated to her, and predicted that Francisco and Jacinta would soon die. Francisco died in 1919, Jacinta in 1920. Lucia remains alive, and has become a member of the Carmelites.

On the day of the lady's final appearance, with a crowd of 50-80,000 in attendance, the sun reportedly began spinning in the sky, changing color and moving closer to the earth.

In 1920, Portuguese sculptor Gilbert Pereira completed a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Commissioned by a former Freemason who had converted to Christianity because of the apparition, Pereira's statue became an object of veneration, and several times was moved from Fatima to other cities.

The statue proved so popular that in 1946, the sculptor made two copies of it,



Guido Del Rose, companion to the National Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima, holds his rosary before the statue during its Wednesday night, Aug. 16, visit to St. Anne's Parish, Rochester.

which were to serve as international pilgrim statues. Demand for visits from the statues grew so much, however, that in 1967 the sculptor made additional copies to serve as national pilgrim statues. One of these copies was designated for the United States.

Because of his interest in Fatima, Del Rose visited the shrine there in the 1960s,

and had put together a slide-show presentation with which he traveled around the Midwest. In 1971, he served on a committee that arranged for a month-long visit of the national pilgrim statue to the Diocese of Joliet.

During the visit, Del Rose helped give talks and answer questions about Fatima. He was asked if he was interested in serving part time as a companion of the statue to provide relief for the regular companion. He agreed and during summer vacations began traveling with the statue. In 1986, he retired after 25 years of teaching to serve as one of the full-time companions, and now travels around the country with the statue seven to eight months of the year.

At St. Anne's, the official program lasted approximately two hours. But people lingered for nearly an hour longer to ask questions, to pray, to have their rosaries and scapulars touched to the statue. Del Rose says the people at St. Anne's are similar to the groups he encountered across the country.

"The size was pretty typical," he says, "and the makeup — the devotion, the very solid kind of Catholic that still believes in prayer and the silent time."

Still, to a non-Catholic, the devotion shown by those at St. Anne's may have appeared to focus on a statue — an idol. Del Rose, however, is quick to defend the people's actions, comparing them to the actions of a person who finds a picture of his long-dead parents, cries and kisses the picture. "He knows it's not them," he explains. "He knows he's kissing a piece of paper. In venerating the statue, we know it's not Mary. The statue represents her just as the picture represents the parents he loves," Del Rose remarks.

Del Rose goes further to point out that veneration and pageantry seem to be part

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Following the two-hour program, many of the nearly 150 people in attendance remained to ask Del Rose questions and to venerate the statue.

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