

Priests describe crying statues

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

LAKE RIDGE, Va. — Two Catholic priests at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Lake Ridge told reporters March 12 that they've seen statues of Mary and Jesus crying, but they simply don't know what it means.

Meanwhile, believers and the merely curious have been flocking by the hundreds every day to the modest church in Northern Virginia, located a few miles outside of Washington, D.C.

Father James C. Bruse — whose touch seems to lead to the statue-weeping that reportedly has now been witnessed by hundreds of parishioners and visitors — stated at a press conference that the wounds of the stigmata he said he began to experience in late December have healed.

"What I do know is that certain statues of Mary and Christ that are touched (by me) do cry. Some statues do, some don't," he said.

Father Bruse, 37, was ordained a priest of the Arlington diocese in 1984.

St. Elizabeth's pastor, Father Daniel Hamilton, 49, stressed repeatedly that no supernatural message has accompanied the unexplained phenomena.

He was sure the phenomena had occurred, but after a weeklong media barrage he chose his words with care

and backed away from some statements quoted in earlier newspaper and television reports.

"The church recommends great caution in forming judgments," he said, echoing a written statement released by the Arlington diocesan chancery office a week earlier when news of the strange events first broke.

Father Bruse made only a brief opening statement at the press conference then sat down. Father Hamilton fielded all questions.

He downplayed numerous questions from reporters about the stigmata — replications of the five wounds of Christ — that reportedly first appeared on Father Bruse around the beginning of the year, about two weeks after the first weeping-statue incident.

Yes, the wounds had appeared on Father Bruse; yes, they hurt him; yes, they had bled at times; but now they were gone, said Father Hamilton in response to the questions. "About two weeks ago was the last time there appeared to be any seepage."

Asked if a doctor had examined the wounds and if there was any medical explanation, he said, "The medical examinations did not reveal anything."

Father Hamilton also was asked about an earlier report in *The Washington Post* in which the pastor said he had seen his own statue of St. Eli-

zabeth Ann Seton cry blood after he had given it to Father Bruse. The pastor said he was not quoted accurately and had not said that it cried blood.

"It was a statue that appeared to have blood on it in Father Bruse's room. It was my statue which I gave him," Father Hamilton said, adding that he has "no knowledge" about what the substance was.

Father Hamilton likewise backed down from earlier statements of his that a statue had cried in the presence of Bishop John R. Keating of Arlington when Father Bruse met with him about the statues and wounds.

The meeting was supposed to be "something in confidence," he said when a reporter asked about it. "I spoke out of turn. I have nothing to say about that meeting."

He confirmed reports from parishioners, however, that a number of them had witnessed weeping from a four-foot statue of Mary that stands to the right of the church's sanctuary.

The statue, a Madonna and Child sculpted in fiberglass but shaped and painted to look like it was cast in bronze, has become the chief object of veneration and curiosity to visitors, because it is the only statue on display in the church that has reportedly wept.

It did not weep during the 90-minute press conference in the church.



AP/Wide World Photos
CAMPAIGN TEARS — Former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos smiles as an old man cries tears of joy upon meeting her at a campaign stop in Cainta, Rizal, outside of Manila March 7. Marcos, widow of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, is one of several candidates in the presidential elections scheduled for May 11.





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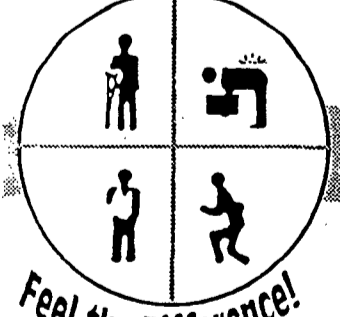
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