

Bishop set up a notable cast for tribunal

It's been 37 years since the late Rochester Bishop James E. Kearney set up a special tribunal to examine Rochester-area witnesses' claims about Venerable Grimoaldo Santamaria's reputation for holiness.

In addition to the chief judge, then-Monsignor and later Bishop John E. McCafferty, he appointed to the court: two "adjunct judges," Monsignor Wilfred T. Craugh and Monsignor James C. McNiff; a "Devil's Advocate" ("Promoter of the Faith"), Monsignor J. Emmett Murphy; and two notaries, then-Monsignor and later Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, and then-Father and later Monsignor George A. Cocuzzi. Three other priests were chosen as "scriptores": Fathers Paul G. Wohlrab, Bernard F. Dollen, and then-Father and later Monsignor Gerard J. Krieg.

Officials, scribes and interviewees were all required to take an oath to tell the truth and to maintain secrecy about the testimony.

Now that the heroic virtues of Venerable Grimoaldo have been confirmed by the Holy See, the oath of secrecy has been voided. Three of the officials died prior to 1991: Bishop John E. McCafferty and Monsignors Craugh and McNiff. Still surviving are Bishop Hickey, Monsignors Murphy, Cocuzzi and Krieg, and Fathers Wohlrab and Dollen.

The three designated interviewees, Vincenzina Panella, Rose Grassi, and Filomena Turchetti, have all gone to their reward. One undesignated witness survives: Almerinda Finocchio, the daughter of Filomena Turchetti. She was interrogated, not on Grimoaldo, whom she never knew, but on the details of an apparent cure of her husband, Augustine Finocchio, through Grimoaldo's intercession.

— Father Robert F. McNamara

Mother continued to enjoy son's 'company'

By Father Robert F. McNamara
Guest contributor

If Ferdinando Santamaria was glad to leave home for the Passionist monastery, it was not because he loved his parents less but because he loved God more. Closely bonded to his father and mother in life — and death — he showed his affection in many ways.

The Passionist Fathers did not inform the parents of their son's illness until several days after his death. Pietro Paolo, furious at what he considered their inhumanity, was ready to go to the convent at Ceccano and to give the superiors a piece of his mind.

The son reportedly intervened, appearing to his father in a dream, surrounded with the beauties of Paradise.

"Don't scold the Passionists," he advised. "They were just following their rule in doing what they did. See how happy I am in heaven. You offered me a horse and carriage if I would not become a monk; but see what God has given to me."

Soon afterwards, Grimoaldo appeared to his mother, also in a dream, and shared some family confidences.

After Pietro Paolo died in 1914, Ce-



File photo
Cecilia Ruscio Santamaria spent her last years in Rochester with her daughter Vincenzina.

ilia longed still more for the child whom she had offered at birth to Our Lady. Yet she knew he hadn't forsaken her. As he had told her once in a dream, "You don't see me, Mamma, but I am always near you."

She was aware of that presence when she emigrated to the United States in 1920 at age 65. Her shipmates grieved that she traveled on her own, but she told them mysteriously that her son was looking after her.

Meanwhile, her daughter in Rochester, Vincenzina Santamaria Panella, was nearly frantic. She did not know when Cecilia had left Italy and where in the world she was. Grimoaldo again came to the rescue. Apparently during a daytime nap, Jenny saw him enter the room. Touching her on the shoulder, he asked, "Why are you crying, sister? I am keeping Mama company."

A short time later Jenny answered a knock on the front door. There stood Cecilia. "Grimoaldo kept me company," she explained.

Cecilia Ruscio spent the rest of her life with the Panella family.

Only in 1933 did Cecilia's health begin to fail. Troubled increasingly by dropsy, and often alone (Jenny and her husband, Tony, as well as both of their daughters, Mary and Helene, worked), she urged Grimoaldo to look in on her. When she was bedridden for a short period before her death, she told the family that she sometimes saw him seated on the foot of her bed. One day she reported that a white dove with golden tail feathers had flown into her room and was perched quietly within her view.

Cecilia Santamaria died on June 6, 1934. She was buried from Holy Cross Church in Rochester. Up to the last she spoke of the dove. Once she spoke to it gratefully, "You have come to take me to eternity. I am happy to go with you."

Nobody else saw either Grimoaldo or the beautiful bird. Were these perhaps the hallucinations of a dying woman?

Not necessarily. She spoke of the dove when Father Pasquale Nigro from St. Anthony of Padua Church gave her the last rites, and he found her in full possession of her faculties. Cecilia was noted for telling the exact truth. It is my belief that what she said she saw, she saw.

Grimoaldo

Continued from page 8

disbelieve the Romanos' account of just what had happened.

Precisely because of their objectivity, the records of the two hospitals were of great value to the medical board named by the Vatican to examine the miracle. The testimony of the eight eyewitnesses was also found reliable and convincing.

Important, too, was the testimony of Nicola himself. He says that when the wheel ran over him he "did not feel the least weight." Often reexamined for aftereffects, he has always tested negative.

Two final questions: Was the young Passionist really that holy? And, if so, what does he say to us today?

Holy he was. As Jenny Grassi declared, "He was not just a good boy in the ordinary sense ... Never have I known such a holy boy."

His fellow Passionists, appreciating his candor and perseverance, compared him favorably to another young Passionist saint, Gabriel Possenti. And Cecilia Santamaria, who knew her son best, said again and again, "One day you will see him beatified."

Obviously a saint.

And his message?

"Our axiom today, too often seems to be not, 'Thy will be done,' but, 'My will be done.'"

Ferdinando Santamaria saw that egotism puts the cart before the horse. Are we not commanded to love God with all our heart? If we give him full priority, then love of neighbor and love of self fall automatically into their proper order. So he believed, so he acted.

Grimoaldo thus reminds us, young and old, that only "one thing is necessary."

May we choose with him this "better part."

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