

## FEATURE

## 'Black eyes,' holy water and crucifix fight devil

By Lynne Weil  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In direct light his irises are dark brown and seem deep beneath the pale lashes and brows. But the stillness and shade of his office widens the pupils, and his eyes appear to change: Two black disks fix themselves on their subject.

Lay workers and clerics living in Vatican City and the faithful from all over southern Italy come to the Church of St. Ann, just inside the Vatican walls, to find relief in those eyes.

Augustinian Father Davide Falcioni, 84, knows well the healing power of a steady, sympathetic look, along with comforting words.

He also has learned that a commanding stare is indispensable in cases where people are thought to be possessed by the devil.

For the last six years, since he stepped down as the pastor of St. Ann's and started hearing confessions nearly full time, Father Falcioni has been performing occasional exorcisms in his office. He arms himself with holy water, a crucifix — and those eyes.

"I have never been afraid of the devil as he has manifested himself in people," Father Falcioni said. "I have always been able to take heart with the help of God."

One day in August, two women with worry written on their faces were admitted to see the priest. When they emerged 20 minutes later, they practically glowed with joy.

They were sisters from a village about an hour's drive southeast of Rome. They said that until seeing Father Falcioni, they had been the victims of a disorder they could attribute only to an evil presence.

One, who said her name was Giacci, 46, said she first "felt strange" two years ago when she began hearing a moan in her right ear. An audiologist's examination turned up nothing unusual.

She said it began to feel as if a hand were pressing on her right shoulder blade. And then, she recalled, she became unable to suppress the urge to swear, which had never been her habit before.

"I was very confused and in great distress," she said. "But I could not bring my-



CNS Photo  
Augustinian Father Davide Falcioni spends much of his time hearing confessions and occasionally performs exorcisms at the Church of St. Ann, just inside the Vatican walls.

self to go into the church, where I had always gone for Mass. And then I started speaking French. I never knew how to speak French before."

Her sister Louisa, 49, had some of these experiences in the brief, few times when Giacci felt well.

"It was as if something terrible was taking turns in us," Louisa said.

The sisters came to Father Falcioni on

the recommendation of a friend. The pair and the priest separately gave the same account of the visit.

"Look at me," Father Falcioni told Giacci, who wriggled and averted her gaze in his presence. "Look at me."

Eventually she returned his stare. She became frightened and shouted, "Black eyes! Black eyes!"

The priest said a prayer, demanded

that the sisters be left in peace and poured a few drops of holy water in Giacci's ear. Suddenly the noise that had plagued her for two years was gone.

"It was wonderful," she said, smiling. "We did not believe in such things before all of this started. But now we must believe."

Father Falcioni said that most of time people's problems are physical or mental not the work of demons.

But the priest said that in those instances where it is clear the devil is to blame, he does not hesitate to take immediate steps before the trouble becomes worse.

"The devil is very astute," Father Falcioni said. "He makes many threats and can be very violent."

There have been times, he added, when the Swiss Guards posted nearby or people working in neighboring Vatican buildings have complained about shouting or the banging of furniture during exorcisms in his office. In those cases, Father Falcioni has gone to people's homes to complete the process.

Asked whether he had ever performed an exorcism for someone living or working in the Vatican, he replied, "Absolutely not. ... And if I had, I would not say so. I have reverence for the Vatican."

Father Falcioni started at St. Ann's as an assistant pastor in 1948. In his first 18 years there, he also performed office chores in the Vatican Secretariat of State and worked for the Vatican Secret Archives.

Pope John XXIII appointed him pastor in 1961. Thirty years later, the position was assigned to a younger man. Father Falcioni said that at that point, Cardinal Virgilio Noe, the pope's vicar for Vatican City State, asked him to stay on, hear confessions and perform exorcisms.

Father Falcioni likes to tell the story of a recent encounter with Pope John Paul II while walking in the Vatican Gardens.

The pope was strolling with Cardinal Noe, who spotted Father Falcioni and said, "Here is our exorcist of the Vatican."

Pope John Paul asked him with a smile, "Are there devils in the Vatican?"

Father Falcioni said he smiled back but said nothing in return.

When the priest told this story to the local press in early August after celebrating a morning Mass with the pope, the media reported the encounter occurred at the papal summer home in Castel Gandolfo, and a joking response on Father Falcioni's part was added.

This clearly irritated him when he read the next day's newspapers.

"The Holy Father knows what I do," he said. "And there was no joking about it."

**"When my husband's dementia started getting worse, the doctor said that a nursing home was the only solution... He was wrong."**



About two years ago, my husband was diagnosed with senile dementia. He seemed okay to me, just forgetful at times. Then he started leaving the house in the middle of the night. I was afraid to go to sleep. I called the doctor; he said it was time to put him in a nursing home. I just couldn't do it!

Then I heard about Clare Bridge. Clare Bridge is a new assisted living residence for people with memory impairments. There my husband can wander safely. The entire residence is secured around-the-clock, so they don't have to use drugs or physical restraints to keep him from leaving. And the programs and services are all geared for people with dementia. It's the ideal situation for us. I have peace of mind knowing that my husband is safe and he's living with dignity, where people understand what his disease is all about.

Clare Bridge... the right decision for someone you love.



**CLARE BRIDGE**  
An Alternative Living Services Residence

159 Sully's Trail, Pittsford, NY 14534

**(716) 249-9990**

*Specialized Assisted Living for the Memory Impaired*



**MIDTOWN MANOR  
APARTMENTS**

(For Age 50 and Older)

- Studio: \$290
- One Bedroom: \$359

Convenient Downtown Location • Walk to Shopping • On Direct Busline • All Utilities Included • Monthly Mass Services Section 8 Accepted

475 East Broad Street, Rochester  
**(716) 546-3650**

**The Hurlbut**  
A Tradition of Quality Care

We are a full service medical facility providing the following services for the comfort of our patients and residents:

- Comprehensive rehabilitation\* services for short term stays
- Specialized care services in the form of: infusion therapy, Wound care & management, Tracheostomy, colostomy, ileostomy, and gastrostomy tube care, Hospice care
- Skilled nursing care and rehabilitation\* for those in need of long term placement
- \* Physical, Occupational, Speech, language Therapy

Admissions and Tours available 7 days a week  
1177 E. Henrietta Rd. Rochester, NY 14623  
**(716) 424-4770 Fax (716) 424-1922**