Reuters/CNS

Lava and smoke spew from Mount Etna July 28 on the Italian island of Sicily.

Volcano ignites prayer

BELPASSO, Italy (CNS) – After almost two weeks of volcanic eruptions and lava flows, Catholics from communities near Mount Etna offered special prayers that their villages would be saved.

Archbishop Luigi Bommarito of Catania, the Sicilian archdiocese which includes the volcano, celebrated Mass July 29 at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rock in Belpasso after lava from new craters threatened two small towns.

"I bless this mountain and invoke the mercy of God upon the craters so that they would close," the archbishop said during the Mass.

"The hotter our prayers, the cooler the lava of Etna will be," he told an estimated 6,000 people at the Mass.

"We must have faith that the Madonna, being a mother, will turn the heart of Christ to the needs, the fears and the worries of the populations which live around the volcano," he said.

The Italian civil defense department was working around the clock using bulldozers to build up banks of cooled and hardened lava to divert the lava flow away from Belpasso and Nicolosi.

As of July 30, material damage from the eruption has been limited to the destruction of a ski lift and a storage shed at the Sapienza Refuge, a tourist facility for excursions to Mount Etna.

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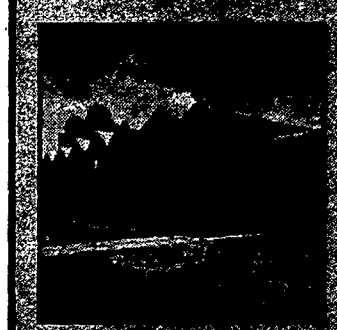

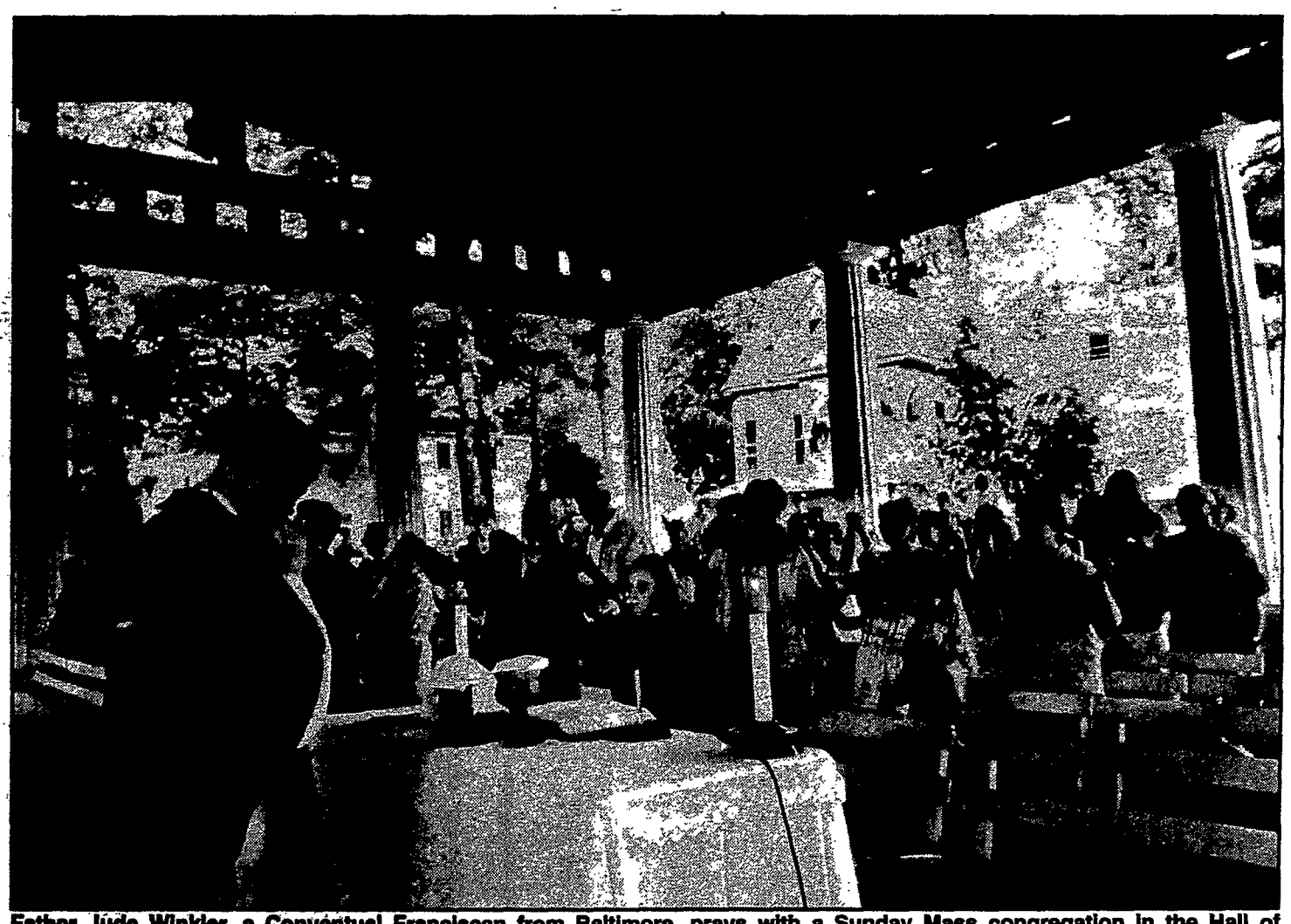

Father Jude Winkler, a Conventual Franciscan from Baltimore, prays with a Sunday Mass congregation in the Hall of Philosophy at the Chautauqua Institution July 29.

Summer at Chautauqua

A minister and a layman pitched tents near Chautauqua Lake, southwest of Buffalo, for the first Chautauqua Sunday School Assembly, Aug. 4-18, 1874. Both were members of the former Methodist Episcopal Church. What they offered was an experimental, continuing-education program for the denomination's Sunday School teachers.

The education was crucial – Sunday Schools filled an important need while public schools were still developing.

Other denominations began establishing cottages at the site, at the encouragement of the minister, the Rev. John Heyl Vincent (later named a bishop), and the layman, educator/inventor Lewis Miller. In 1902 the assembly became known as the Chautauqua Institution.

"It was supposed to be all-denominational, not nondenominational," said Ellie Lesser. "Each was to bring the best of its tradition to table to share."

Lesser and her husband, Jack, moved to the grounds in 1987 from Big Flats, Chemung County. The couple were members of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads.

The Lessers' research shows that the first Roman Catholic Mass at the Chautauqua was celebrated Aug. 4, 1895, by Father Edward Gibbons, later bishop of Albany.

"However, the Catholic presence that began with this Mass in August of 1895 faded," according to Ellie Lesser. Denominational houses proliferated across the grounds, and churches built or incorporated chapels. But a Catholic house was open only a short while, according to the Rev. Ross Mackenzie, Chautauqua historian. Visiting priests offered Sunday Masses in various locations, for the most part.

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STORY BY KATHLEEN SCHWAR • PHOTOS BY ANDREA DIXON