
PROVINCIAL RESIDENCE

148 Main Street

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. 10802

June 1, 1979



Dear Confreres,

It is my sad duty to inform you of the death of

FATHER FRANCIS KNIFIC S. D. B.

Father Knific has spent the past seventeen years in an invalid's bed sometimes hanging precariously between life and death as he struggled to overcome the effects of a fall which left him partially paralyzed on January 1, 1962.

Father Knific was born to Anthony and Mary Ann Knific, innkeepers at Tupalice in the Austrian Empire, on December 16, 1893. A devout Catholic boy, he discovered Don Bosco and entered the Salesian novitiate at Radna, near Sevnica and pronounced his first religious vows on the fifteenth of August, 1913. Three years later, on the feast of Our Lady's Assumption, he consecrated himself perpetually to God.

After three years of continued philosophical studies at Radna, he spent three years of tirocinium at Rakovnik in Ljubljana. His pupils from those years remember that he completed the examinations at the public teachers college, entertained the children with his talent for story-telling, and led the school with his excellence on the actor's stage. His extraordinary intellectual gifts made him a candidate for the Gregorian University in Rome, where he completed his seminary studies with a Ph.D. in philosophy and a Ph.D. in theology before ordination on May 26, 1923.

Responsibility and difficulty followed Father Knific throughout life. He returned from the Gregorian University to his alma mater at Radna as professor of philosophy. After two years he was appointed director of the Oratory at Kodeljevo where he remained for four years before another assignment as director of the Archdiocesan boarding school in Zagreb which had been entrusted to the Salesians.

In 1932 he was asked to return to Slovenia, his home state, as a professor of theology—a vocation, a mission, and a service which he performed generously in the congregation for the next thirty years, at Rakovnik, at Ljubljana in Slovenia, at Monteortone in Italy, and at Aptos in California (USA).

When Nazi troops invaded Slovenia he was forced to flee, under protection of the Italian flag, to Monteortone near Padua. Later he was able to return as director to Rakovnik. Communist invaders assumed control of Yugoslavia after the war and drove Fr. Knific, along with many of his confreres, from their beloved country for the last time. After a brief stay as assistant priest in the parish of Predoslie, he was ordered by government authorities to cease all priestly duties and report to the government office in Ljubljana. He fled instead to Italy, and then to the U.S.A., arriving at Newton, New Jersey in 1948. He continued on to the Salesian Theological Institute at Aptos, California, where he served as director for four years and professor of theology for ten years.

In 1959 Father Felix Penna called Father Knific away from his career as teacher of future priests to join the provincial council and become director of the Provincial House in New Rochelle, New York. His affability, his years of experience as a teacher, his wisdom in dealing with others—above all his sense of Salesian piety—made him the ideal man to hold together bold new enterprises taking shape in the growing province.

As a priest confronting first the Nazi menace and later the horror of Communism, Father Knific distinguished himself through writing. Many remember his pamphlets which spoke forthrightly and clearly about the difference between Catholic faith and these atheistic ideologies. His writing was popular, simple, clear, the product of a disciplined and gifted mind.

On January 1, 1962, Father Knific, already 69 years of age, fell on an icy road between Salesian High School and the Provincial

residence. The fall caused permanent brain damage which has held Father Knific like a cross upon which he offered his sufferings until his quiet passing on April 21, 1979.

We ask the charity of your prayers for Father Francis Knific as we acknowledge our own debt—as individuals and as a province—to him for so many years of good example, of charity, and of service. May he, with the blessing of Mary Help of Christians, rest in peace.

Fraternally yours in Christ,
Rev. Dominic DeBlase, *S.D.B.*
Director

Data for the Necrology: Father Francis Knific, born at Tupalice December 16, 1893, died at the Bronx, New York, on April 21, 1979 at eighty-five years of age, having completed sixty-five years of religious profession, fifty-five years of priesthood, and thirteen years as director.

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